THE PARIS REVIEW

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an interview
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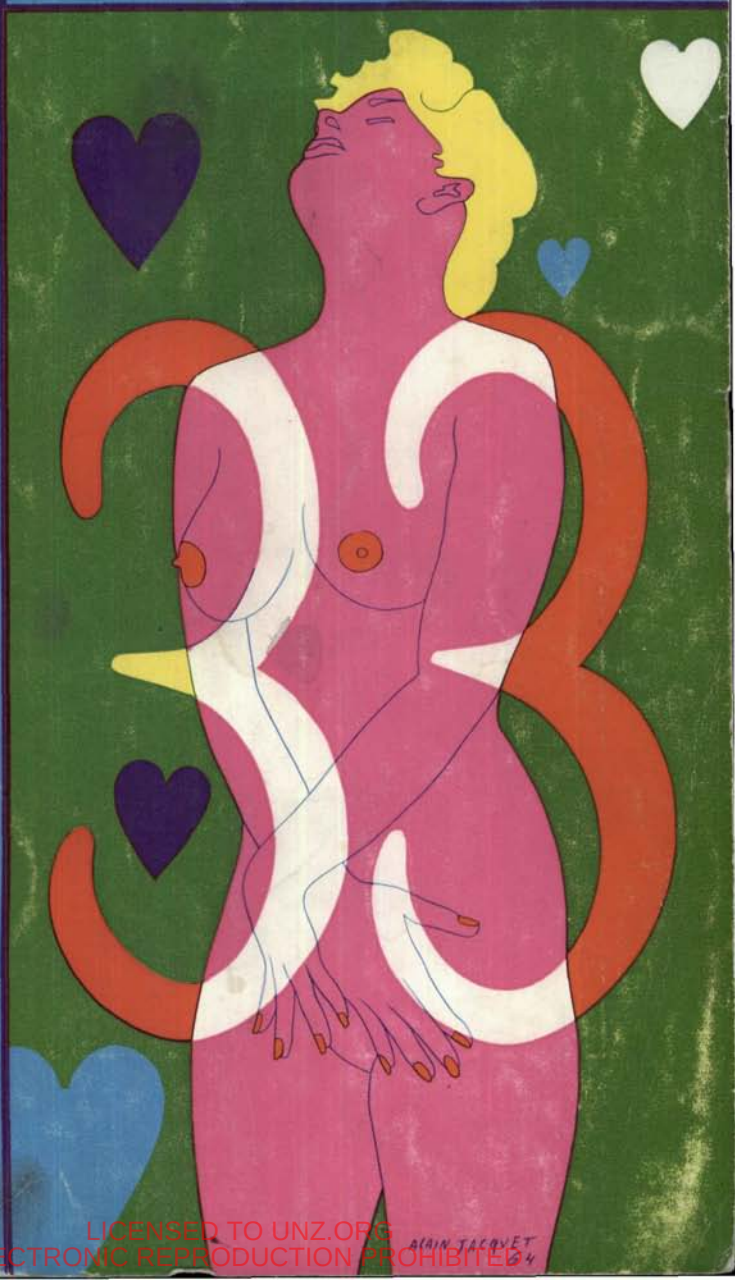

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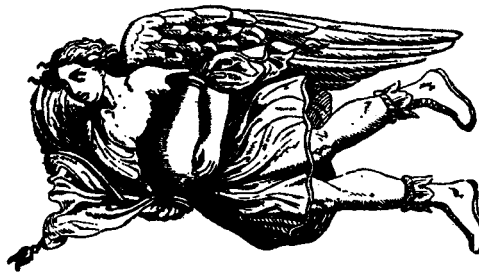

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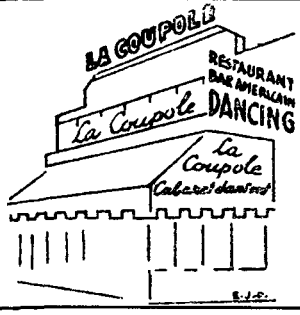

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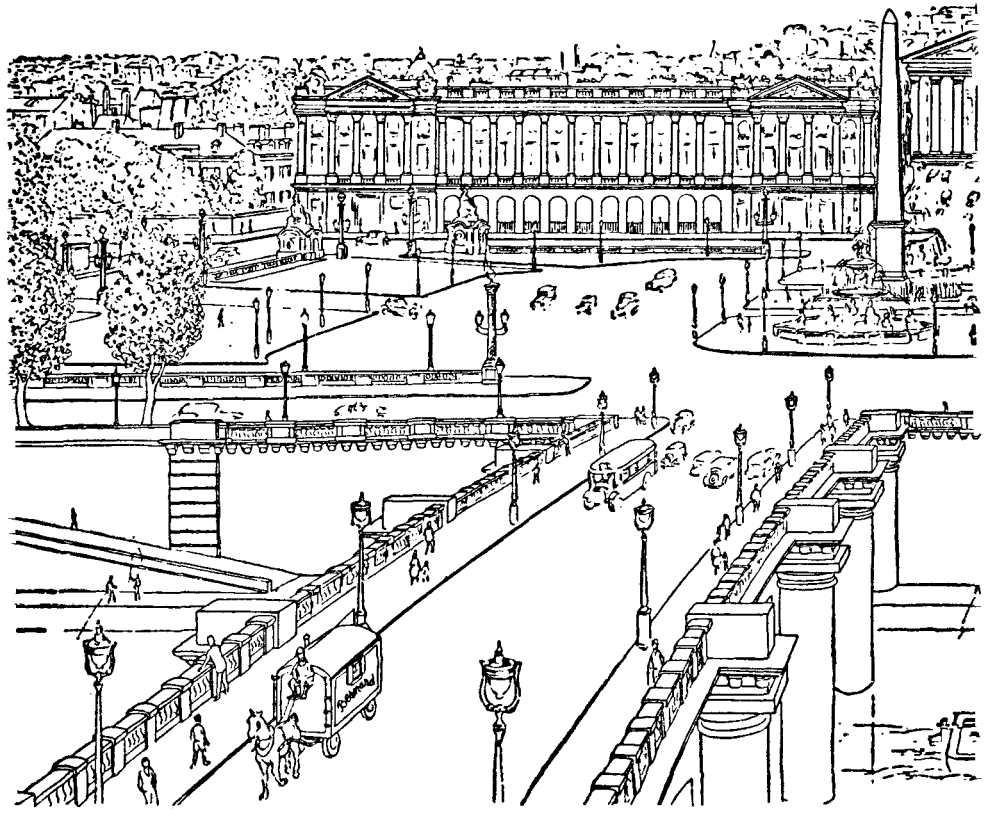

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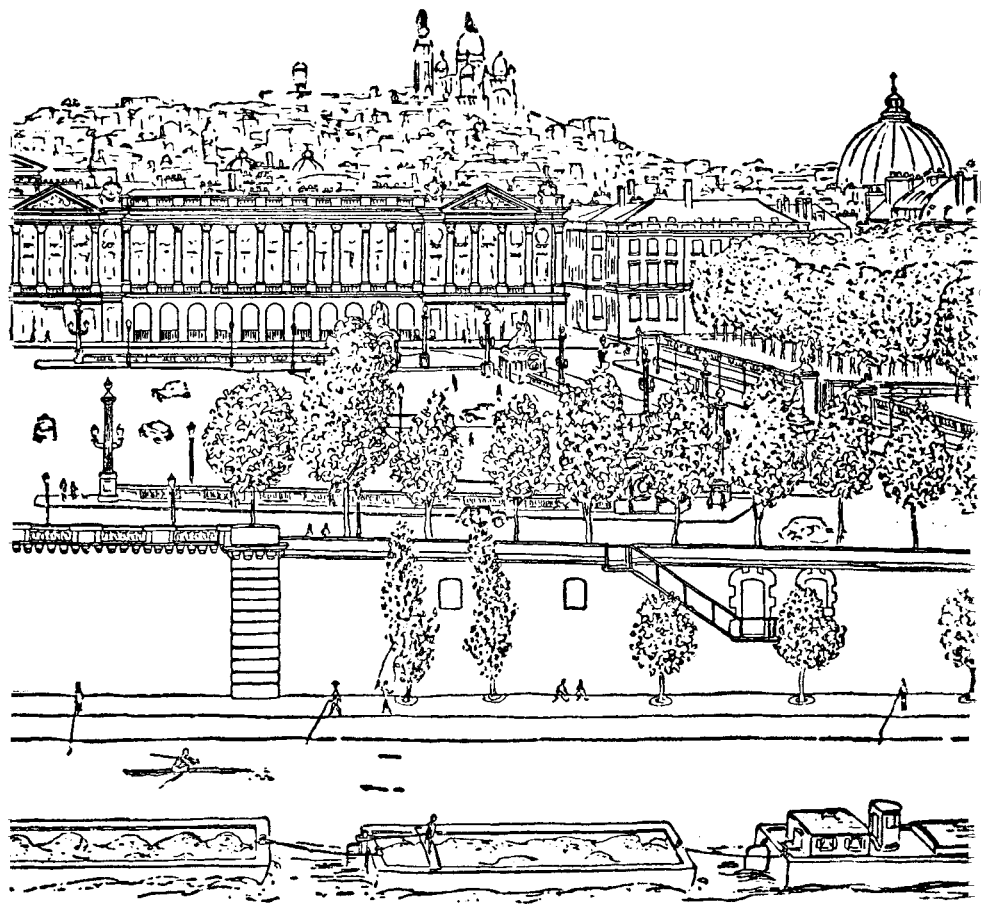

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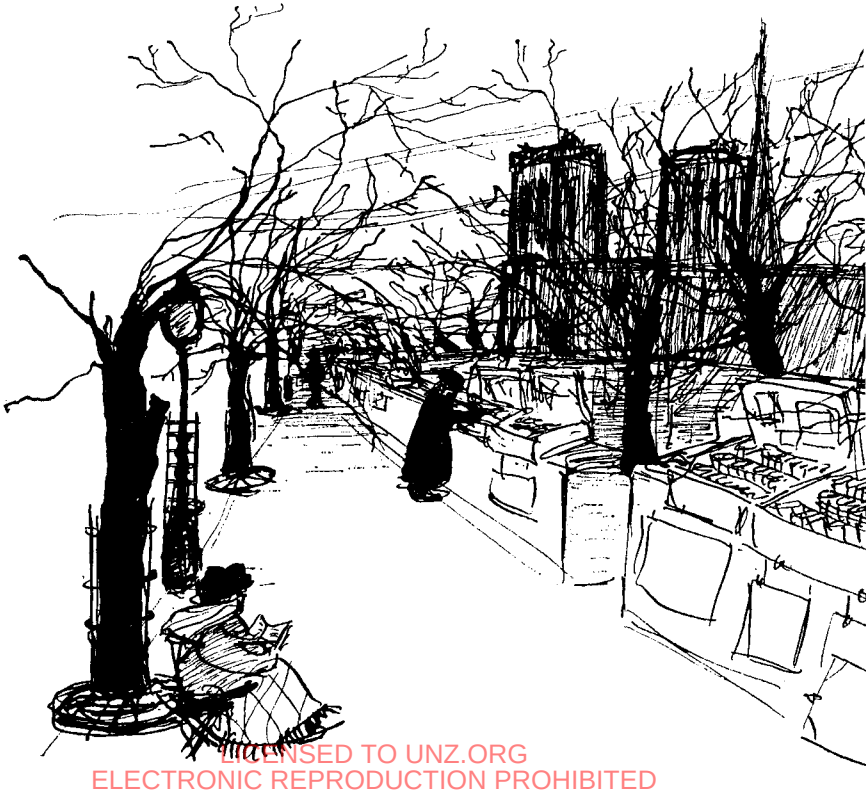

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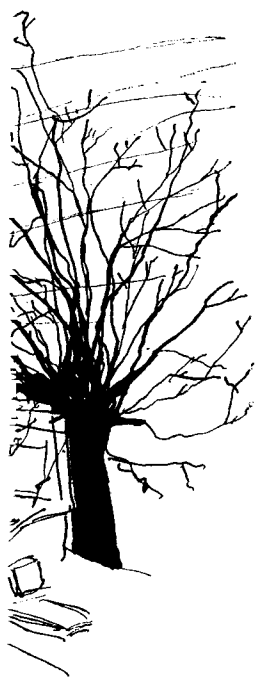

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Oh, The Wonder!

Jeremy Larner

I

On a warm evening in May, Willie McBain telephoned his friend Lickens, who lived not far away on the Lower East Side of New York City.

"For me the worst time is after supper," he told Lickens. "It gets worse every minute. I try to keep from sleeping so I won't dream. I make sure that even if I do fall out I've got the lights and the radio on."

"But just what is it?" Lickens wanted to know.

"That's it, that's it: I don't know. Nothing! I'm going out of my box!"

"Afraid of getting married?"

"Of course! I'm afraid of everything. Oh the wonder of it, Lickens! Oh the wonder of it all. Life is unbearable. How can you be alive without going out of your box?"

"There are ways," Lickens said.

"Not with my stomach. I can't keep anything inside me, Lickens. I vomit before dinner and I vomit after dinner. I'm even afraid to go to the docaroony."

"Then that's what you're afraid of."

"Sure! But the reason I'm afraid is that if I keep talking to him I might really find out what I'm afraid of."

"So you're not only afraid, you're afraid of finding out what you're afraid of?"

"Oh the wonder of it all!"

"Me, too." Lickens sighed.

"Lickens!"

"Um?"

"Come over here and go me sock for sock!"

Lickens demurred. His arms had not yet recovered from the

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last time. He suggested they go for a beer.

"Can't," said Willie. "I've got to work."

"But you won't work. You know that. Take a break and then maybe things will be better."

"Then maybe things will be tomorrow, that's all! But why not? No, fuck it Lickens, this has got to be done tonight, so get thee the hell away from me. I've got to hang up."

"Good luck."

Willie McBain was a graduate student in Philosophy at Columbia University. He had set aside that night—just as he had set aside the eleven nights previous—to finish a paper that had been due in January. Within a week his extensions would be up on two more papers from the Fall semester, and he had not even begun research on one of them. When those were finished, he would have three fun-packed weeks in which to write his Master's paper and pass his language examinations. He complied with the mickeymouse because he wanted to teach; he thought he had a new way of teaching. Willie wanted to account for man's unpleasant psychology in philosophic terms. Specifically, he was impressed by the problem of aggression. From all that he felt and saw, he knew that to live was to hurt oneself. Could the pattern be undone? Could men come to know the score and do what they could for themselves? Or were his thoughts merely personal? These were the questions he would make his students answer, the very questions that had been neatly avoided by the spinners of spiritual and political systems. Because they were afraid: it's always so much easier to write things out neatly when you don't have to care how they really are. Willie was going to make them see. He would hunt them down remorselessly, cutting off every avenue of transcendental escape. He didn't have the answers, he knew; but he could make a start by insisting on the real questions.

But sooner or later he would have to write a book, and for the moment Willie McBain could not even manage to read a book. He would plot his time and settle carefully in the rubble of his railroad flat, only to find himself staring for

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hours at a single page. He could concentrate for a paragraph or two, then twenty minutes would disappear and he would come back to himself with a start, furious, without the slightest idea where he had been. The psychiatrist agreed that it was more than a matter of will-power. But still it made Willie angry. No matter what the doctor said, sooner or later he had to control himself, that was what it boiled down to, or else they might as well start padding the walls and removing sharp objects.

He pawed for the phone, and called Philadelphia where his fiancée was finishing her last year at college.

"I can't work," he told her. "I'm like that machine that turns itself off. Why don't you go out and find someone worthwhile?"

"Because I've got someone," she said. "Someone who turns *me* on. Willie, if you could only relax for a while. It doesn't make any difference if you can't do what you want right this minute. You'll do your work when you're really and truly ready, and tearing at yourself won't help."

"Sure I'll do my work! What if I don't? There's no law says I will. What's the difference between me and thousands of pretentious half-wits in this city who gas about what they are going to do some day?"

"There is a difference; I can't prove it to you but there is. I know it and so does everyone who ever met you."

Willie laughed. "Don't be a goddam girl-friend!"

She didn't answer. "What's the matter?" he said. "Are you hurt?"

"I guess so," she said. "I'm sorry."

"Look," he said. "I'm going to flunk out of school. I'll be drafted and you'll never see me again."

"I wouldn't like that. I'd go to the Army and make them give you back."

"What are you doing?" he asked her. "Get anything done tonight?"

She giggled. "Oh, I'm supposed to be studying for my Sosh finals tomorrow. But I think I know the material pretty well —I've just been sitting up talking with Francine..."

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"Francine! That flaccid ass!"

"Shhhhhhhhh."

"Don't shhh me! I thought you promised not to see her anymore."

"I didn't promise."

"Oh, I get it, you just let me *think* you promised!"

"I can't talk about it now."

"Why not, 'cause she'll hear? Screw that! Who's more important to you anyway, me or her! Are you going to waste your whole life on namby-pamby gushing fawning half-wits? People who might challenge you you avoid like the plague! What's going to become of you, goddammit?"

He was nearly out of his box with rage. He shouted at her until she cried. When it was over he felt worse than ever. She promised to send Francine away and go back to studying, and he said, choking, that it didn't really matter what she did. He said if only he had her in his bed right that very instant—that was all that could make any difference. When he hung up he took a dish and slammed it against the wall.

Sarah was really not the girl for him. Perhaps he only loved her because she loved him. She was so utterly dependent on him, couldn't make a move without him, no plans, no ambitions, no nothing of her own... She wanted to be pregnant: he had to make damn sure every time that she got her diaphragm in. The ready-made identity! She would marry him and attach her life to his like a leech. But wasn't that what a woman was supposed to do? Was it wrong for a bright young girl to think of nothing but babies? Or was he so far out of his box he coudn't see straight?

But how would she become a person? Sarah wanted to think their life together was a lovey-dovey-ducky-wucky dreamaroony, and that wasn't what life was like! Life was too goddam unbearable, you had to be ready to fight! He, at least, had the guts to go to the doctor.

He paced the room thinking of his prize-fighting days. Maybe he should have turned pro. The new light-heavyweight champ was a punk. Willie had a theory about how he could be set up. He cracked his fists into the porcelain of the

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fridgaroony, feeling it dent and spring out again. Neighbors pounded on the thin wall, loosening bits of plaster, and Willie pounded back, pound for pound, till the ceiling shook and he heard crashes on the other side.

He heard someone running down the stairs. Maybe the cops would come. Willie had never quite hit a cop. He coveted that pleasure: to sink a fist in one's massive blue frontage. He didn't care if they killed him.

He sat on the bed to watch a movie he had started in his mind. He was putting the slug to one cop after another while they pumped bullets into him and the whole block poured out to watch in love and fascination. Everyone loved him, he knew it—no matter if he brought the roach-infested house down. Even Sarah, whose teary face in the movie gave him a laugh. No babies now. No comfy for Sarah. Bitterly he thought how she would be the only one to miss the splendour of his gesture. She would feel cheated, and even think him foolish.

The hell with her, he would be dead. He laughed out loud and shook his head. He couldn't understand why when he was depressed he thought so little of dying. Normally the fear of death overtook him in every happiness, ran him down like a wolfhound. He was pondering this when the phone rang...

Ten minutes later he phoned Lickens.

"Luscious Louise called," he reported.

"Um," said Lickens.

"She wants me to come over. She's lonely. She wants me to talk to her. Let's be friends, she says."

"You going?"

"I shouldn't. But I was thinking what the hell I can't work anyway, maybe after this I'll come back, take a benny, stay up all night and it will be all out of my system, see?"

"So why call me?"

"You're supposed to talk me out of it."

"That's not fair. ...but if you want, I'll go in your place."

"No," answered Willie, still sad, though the fact was that Lickens' offer had clinched it for him. "I'm going. Trouble is,

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I've got this itch in the old groinaroony..."

"...and when Ah itches, Ah scratches!" Lickens drawled.

Luscious Louise made it difficult for about half an hour. She really did want to talk. She didn't know what to do with herself. She was too bright; she was tired of being a secretary. She had this idea that she would go to law school and she wanted Willie McBain to love her for it. Willie knew what her trouble was.

"I know what your trouble is," he said. "You want a penis. But you can't get one by going to law school. The only way is to use mine while you have a chance."

She tried to get on her high horse, but he wouldn't let her. He knew she wanted to.

"You know you want to," Willie said.

She sighed.

Making love to Louise was like riding the white horse in the circus. Where was she taking him, slick nervous antelope with such strange interior muscles?! She could play a tune on him like a piccolo. Sarah was tamer and didn't shriek so much—well, why should she? He loved her, she knew it... he wasn't even thinking of Luscious Louise except when she... wow!...she was going out of her box...he had never ...now why couldn't Sarah be more like

this!

?

When she saw it was all up with him she snuggled close and closed her eyes in contentment. But Willie lay with his fists clenched and teeth jammed together like nails. He couldn't stand it; he wanted to get up and rush out on the fire escape and throw himself over. If he relaxed a single muscle he would plunge headfirst down the brickface wall and crunch powerfully through the sidewalk miles deep beneath the candy store.

Louise was clutching at his arms. "Willie, Willie-baby..."

"Let me go!"

He stood facing her, pathetic in his undershirt, his back against the wall while she made absurd calming motions.

"Get out of bed and I'll slam you one!"

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She lay where she was. As he pulled on his clothes he heard her sniffling. Only when he was safely down in the street and running did he realize he had been tearing his hair and ears.

He ran six blocks down Avenue B and thumped three-at-a-time up the wooden steps of Lickens' tenement.

He knocked and from within heard the sounds of Lickens grumbling and rolling out of bed. Then the striking of a match.

"You!" said Lickens. "G'morning, silly bastard!"

Willie saw that Lickens' eyes were not quite open.

"Now Lickens, sorry to wake you, man, just get back in bed, fall out, land of nod, forget and forgive, Lickens, that's it, easy there..."

"Peckerhead!" Lickens mumbled, as Willie eased him back onto his mattress. The keys were on the night table where Willie could palm them without any trouble. He stood for a while watching Lickens drop back to sleep and right next to him Lickens' beautiful wife sleeping in a band of moonlight, her face calm and womanly, her long hair strewn lightly on the pillow. Her features were more relaxed than in her waking hours. And her mouth closed. He bent close to admire her full lips and long dark lashes. She breathed sweetly as a doe. And look at Lickens lying there, snorting and twisting! What a jackass to be thumping himself around so and sticking his silly head under the pillow! Lickens didn't have any problems. His only problem was he thought he had problems. Lucky Lickens!

But no luckier than he, Willie McBain, might be! He had no debts, no job, no cancer. Nothing to lose but worry and time.

The junkpiley Lickensmobile sat right around the corner. Willie unlocked it, started it up and set off for Philadelphia.

He bit his nails at eighty miles an hour down the New Jersey turnpike. He didn't know it, but he was worried that he would arrive to find Sarah gone. Hung around his mind like an albatross was a picture of her with Roger Stennis. Stennis was the most respected student in Sarah's graduating class—an alert young man with quick lips and clean eyes.

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Stennis was going to be an historian, and one of the best: he had won a fellowship to Oxford and Willie was certain that Roger would like nothing better than to take Willie's Sarah along with him. And it was logical—why shouldn't she go? Wouldn't a cottage on the green and a well-bordered life and a creative, productive, attentive husband be far, far preferable to a stinking slum-hole in New York and a hung-up, hateful husband off screwing with Luscious Louise and even when with her flailing and cursing, climbing up by tearing her down, desperately clutching and snapping at every weakness in sight in his last-ditch efforts to punish the world for his own shortcomings? A sweet, bright girl like her, so long abused? She should have been long gone already. Without seeing it he saw in his mind a bed with Sarah and Roger Stennis well-sheeted together.

He would never forget what had happened when he took off on his canoe trip the summer before. On principle he had insisted that Sarah not refuse dates with other men, but when she wrote him she had gone out with Roger Stennis he nearly went out of his box. Stennis had been in love with her a long time—no doubt about that. Sure, going out he didn't mind, but Stennis was a betrayal! He would kill the bastard. He would blast his head open with a hard right.

There was blood in his mouth from where he had chewed into his cheek. Glancing at his gas gauge, he saw the needle stuck on empty, and, dressed hurriedly as he was in workshirt and jeans, his rummagings produced a mere quarter. His headlights picked up a sign announcing a rest stop. He had to think of something. Fifteen minutes later he found himself sitting over an empty coffee cup in a Howard Johnson's. He tried to remember the waitress bringing him the coffee: had she been friendly? Perhaps he had gotten it himself. He was sitting alone at a little table, and the only other people in the place were a clutch of fifteen-sixteen-year-old boys at the counter.

Damned if they weren't giggling!

They were staring at him and trying to puzzle him out and giggling because they had never seen anything like him in

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their part of New Jersey.

Willie glared back with a vicious eyeblast intensity utterly unequal to their intentions and sending them into gales of laughter.

Willie's standing silenced them, until a brave one voiced the single word they knew for him: "Hey Mister, you a beatnik or sompin!"

Willie said, "No, are you?" A volcano of giggles.

"What's your name?" Willie said. "You!"

The boy was stumped for a second. "Puddentane!" he said triumphantly, and put his comrades in convulsions.

"Well look, Puddentane, you look like a beatnik to me, with all that acne and that grease on your hair. How about it?"

"I'm just a normal American boy," Puddentane replied. The laughter this time was uneasy; the boys poked each other, shifted, whispered.

"What do normal American boys do with themselves, Puddentane? Hang around Howard Johnson's all night and stare at customers?"

"If we feel like it," said Puddentane. "We're not big-time like you."

"Don't you masturbate?"

The boys giggled in shock and broke out in very loud laughter and finally hoots. "Oh, brother!" said Puddentane. "You *are* a wierd one!"

"It's wierd to talk about sex, isn't it? You normal American boys don't like it, do you? It embarrasses you, huh?"

"Oh sure," someone said. No one was laughing.

"If it doesn't embarrass you, why are you turning red, Puddentane?"

Puddentane didn't know why he was turning red, but he did know, at last, that he had hated Willie's guts the moment he saw him. The boys shrunk back like snakes, their eyes fixed on Willie.

"Why don't you go back to Russia?" one of them inquired.

"You want to fight?" said Willie instantly.

He caught them unprepared. The five of them working together could have taken him, but separately they couldn't

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decide. Time out for consultation.

"I'll leave you normal American boys to your circle-jerk." Willie took his departure.

As he went out the door, he heard behind him the shout, "Goodbye, beatnik!"—and then a chorus of shouts: "Goodbye, Communist, Goodbye, orang-utang, Goodbye, pigpen!" The five trailed behind as he walked toward the Lickensmobile and came close as he started it, shouting, jeering, thumping on the fenders and windows.

A mile later Willie remembered his gas gauge. Since traffic was light he was able to back carefully up the turnpike till he reached the Howard Johnson's again. There was a souped-up Ford in back which obviously belonged to the blackhead set. Willie took Lickens' always-ready rubber tube from the back seat and siphoned off the gasoline from the jutting Fordaroony into the thirsty tank of the Lickensmobile. As he was finishing the boys came out and spotted him. The Ford gave hot pursuit and undoubtedly would have caught him had it not run out of gas in three minutes.

But Willie had forgotten his new-found enemies in two minutes. He was remembering Sarah: "Roger? Why, he's only a *boy*!"

"Did you kiss him?" he had asked.

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"Yes," she had said, flaring up. "I think so. So what?" *I think so? So what!* How had he put up with her solid brass evasiveness? He was eating on his tongue. It was obvious she was gone; he knew it now. He was driving full speed ahead into a tunnel that receded as fast as he came. But if he could encounter anything at all in the tunnel he would destroy it, or destroy himself trying.

He swung into Philadelphia and drove straight to the apartment where Sarah lived with her roommate, charged up the stairs and knocked three hard knocks at the door. In a matter of seconds he expected to be back in the Lickensmobile, racing for every last inch of justice he could extract. There was no answer to his knock. But he had forgotten that it was six o'clock in the morning. He had stormed down two landings when he heard the door open; he rushed back up and there was the anxious, bewildered, asleep face of his Sarah peering out from behind the door. There was no question of her not being there; it did not even occur to him. They sat in the kitchen having breakfast, she delighted and asleep, he at last relaxed. He had not remembered the depth or the sureness of her brown eyes, the charming rumple of her cotton bathrobe, her little breasts peeping out at him like baby birds. Relaxed: the new sun rippled on the kitchen wall, toilets flushed, radios came on. The dread night had vanished and Willie might curl the warm day around him and sleep.

Sarah tucked him into her bed all odorous of woman and he tumbled down a well, his thoughts behind him. He was up by noon, before she got back from her last final exam, in time to shower and wash all the Lusciousness of Louise from his stomach, chest and groin. Sarah's roommate was up and made bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwiches smothered in mayonaisse and rye bread (because she loved Willie, too, naturally—it was a problem). Willie ate two huge BLT's, laughed, joked, drank his beer, pinched Sarah's ass and the roommate's too. After lunch he went into Sarah's room and into bed with Sarah, quickly, voraciously, because the instant he was through Willie jumped up and sat down at the typewriter and from memory resumed his paper at the point where he

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had left off and finished it without even stopping to hesitate. There was no doubt in his mind, nor of anything else at the moment. If he did not go out of his box at an early age, he was going to be quite a man.

In only an hour he was through, and out of steam anyway, and collapsed back in bed with Sarah, where for a full five minutes he watched her sweet, spirited eyes dart back and forth along the book she was reading. Then his watching was too much for her and she turned to him. Until suppertime they stuck close, each to the other's skin, and talked about what they would make of their life together. Willie stretched out as he talked, and watched the afternoon sun come bouncing off the upturned venetian blinds and sparkle slowly across the ceiling.

More than anything, Sarah wanted to be his and to bear his children. But she had decided to take a degree in Social Psychology; for she had to be a person in her own right, and this meant having work of her own to last her whole life long and keep her from bringing to her children that desperate clutch which her own mother even now could not relax. Willie nodded, basked in her completeness. There was nothing unbeautiful in her, she fitted together in every part and thought: when he was not out of his box he saw this truly and wondered at his incredible luck in having her. What had he done, he whispered, caressing her trim thigh, interrupting her, to deserve someone so perfect? Just being you, she answered to his most private ear, pulling him close and delighting him with a gesture they had never before dared or even imagined.

Their final plans, as the light wobbled orange on the ceiling: in the morning they would drive to New York, take out a license and get married by a justice of the peace. Or why get married at all? he wondered idly—but she shyly confessed it meant something to her, she still had that much of the middle class in her. Or maybe it really wasn't that at all, she insisted, growing more confident, but simply that she wanted to feel him hers, the full weight of their promise to each other. Promise? Willie laughed, but he was flattered, pleased,

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touched... She thought him capable of keeping a promise!

Even so her parents would be shocked, but never mind... they would get over it, and she would never in all eternity get over him. Her parents would say how can you live? But what did they know about living? Willie and Sarah would live all right, just watch them.

They did not need the things their parents had needed. They would be too alive for the buying-earning routine through which they were expected to stumble and excuse their lives away. They had no use for empty job-working. They would live simply in an old barn in the country, changing it over with the love of their own hands, making it belong to them and the pulsing life they would bring to it. Life was possible, really possible, for those who had the gift of loving.

II

Willie came back to himself like an object sucking into a vacuum. Without warning, the room was dark. Night had pushed the sun down out of the sky and crept over the land looking for Willie. It got worse every minute, as it had the day before and the day before that, as it did on days when he loved and days when he was removed from his love. Sarah was sleeping nestled in his shoulder; he looked at her, felt of her...and could not stand her breathing there. He stroked her hair, trying, trying—he thrust her roughly away. He did not wake her. She looked like a goddam child. What had she ever done in her life to make him believe she could be a woman? He couldn't have a woman, not him, not yet: he was too weak and too young. They made an absurd spectacle, Sarah and he—two overgrown babies hugging each other and playing big people in a dream world. Disgusting! She was so soft he could hardly fuck her. Why did he need this? His moment with Luscious Louise seemed infinitely more honest.

It was getting worse and he couldn't face it. Headlights shot into the room and raced across the ceiling. He lay petrified. He wanted to sleep, to conk out and stay out—but he

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was afraid of his dreams. His fists clamped tight to his groin, he tried grimly to focus on the hayloft in that mythical barn, where he would have rigged a punching-bag. Of course there would be no barn. No morning, either, nothing but a grubby, scroungy life of night after night. The doctor couldn't cure him—what nonsense for her to count on that! There was nothing to cure him of, his sickness was life. He was not out of his box; it was just that he could not fool himself. He was not a woman, he could not lie all warm and smelly and dream of babies and houses: the night was there and he saw it, and there was nothing he or anyone could do about it.

If he could not sleep he had to act, to move. Or else it would all be up. He must rise now and turn on the lights and the radio. Get up, get out of bed, turn on lights and radio. He strained against his body until he broke out in a violent sweat. Lying paralyzed and unblinking in the soaking sheets he saw himself pulled as if by a magnet, sucked to the window and through the slats of the venetian blinds, through the shivered glass and through the crusted streets like so many sheets of paper, cutting clean as a knife-blade into the grave.

He rose at last, lurching heavily, a landlubber coming on deck in a hurricane and stumbling for the rail...arms stiff as boards, he snapped on the lights, snapped on the radio.

Got to the bathroom as his insides came rushing out, and lay with his head in the toilet-bowl while his lungs and stomach heaved in dry spasms. He was dying, surely dying, oh merciful God, just let it be quick, he prayed to himself. Later he knew that Sarah must have woken up; she clung to his back, soothing him, still asleep and moaning for his hurt. With a twitch of his shoulders he shrugged her away, so that she banged her head on the sink and cried like a little girl. He threw up again, this time with relief; lay weak with his head in the toilet, purged, subsiding; and he loved her and everyone with all his heart, mixing his own happy tears with the vomit.

They went out to eat—showered, dressed up, holding hands and feeling large and good as an opera. It should have worked.

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The restaurant was something special: linen napkins, silver three-foot menus, two kinds of waiters, and so many plates there was no room for your elbows. Maybe it was too much for them. They ate extremely well, but there was nothing to say. Sarah simply sat there. Willie made a few remarks on his work, then hers, and she made routine answers, but she had nothing to say, nothing to start on her own. She was nervous and did not want to talk at all, just sit there and enjoy being with him. He saw she felt only for him; it was he who had to begin any thought that might connect them to the outside world, to life. She was competent to follow; it was up to him to begin and she would follow wherever he led. Willie saw more clearly than ever that his love for Sarah could bring him into no new relations with the world. Hardly! Difficult as it was to keep himself alive he would henceforth be expected to pull for two.

He sat on the back of his neck with his meat and potatoes, bread and tomatoes bombing him to his chair, while the chair itself sank slowly to the bottom of the ocean. As the depths closed over him he saw her smile, waveringly. Oh the tentativity of her; she could scarcely keep herself afloat! Her hand drifted toward him apologetically. Hardly daring to touch, she walked her fingers on the back of his hand.

"You have nothing to say for yourself, do you?"

She was hurt. "Am I on trial?"

He belched. "Oh what the hell!" he said.

"Look, it's been a long day," she said, biting her lip. If only she would lose her temper!

"And a hard day?" he needled hopefully.

"A hard day but a very good day," she said quietly. "Willie, I'm so tired. Please don't be hard on me."

He couldn't even bring himself to look at her. "I'm not being *hard* on you," he muttered. He ordered a globular heap of ice creams, which impacted themselves together about halfway down.

They walked down one of the streets bordering campus, where all the little stores were still open and brightly lit. Neat pressed suits could be had, and notebooks. He shoveled

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through a used-book stack while she looked on absently, as though all books were alike to her. He walked her rapidly down the street to one of the movie-houses. They were playing a sophisticated comedy with titillating risqué dialogue, the kind of picture he would see only in an emergency. He stopped with her in front of the posters.

"Well?" he said. She smiled, ready to go either way. "Do you want to see it?"

"If you do, Willie."

"The hell with whether I do! You're a person! This is a movie—either you want to see it, deep down *here* (poking her), or you don't. But don't do it just for me, baby—don't let yourself get away with that!"

She stuck her lip out and walked away. He ran after her, grabbed her roughly.

"No, goddammit! I'm not going to let you be hurt. That's too easy, Sarah. I just want to know a simple thing: do you or don't you want to see the movie? It's only a decision, baby, it's got nothing to do with me. You just say yes or no and it's all over."

She tried to jerk away, hatefully, but he held her fast. "You absolute bastard!" she cried. She began to weep. Willie relaxed. She was his small, tender girl, and he wanted only to love her and soothe her hurt. While he held her and caressed her she blubbered that she didn't know, didn't care about the movie—she knew he was nervous and would be happy doing anything that helped him relax, that's all, because she loved him. She didn't think of going to a harmless movie as a decision, she wasn't thinking of wasting her valuable time or building her valuable life. She was with him, and did it make much difference what they did?

Okay, okay, he said. Please don't cry. Here: he kissed away a tear. She cried happily now, with her head sniffling on his chest. People were looking. I feel so foolish, she said, standing like this in the middle of the sidewalk.

They walked on; he couldn't blame her. It was his twisted-up way of seeing things. But he had nothing left to say to her. Had they really said all they ever had to say in one afternoon?

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They walked on in silence past the little shops and the dressy college people, and Willie wanted desperately to be alone.

He felt like dashing up the street and around the corner. Just standing by himself in his own body would be so free and fine. No little one to tow along beside him. Just to be himself in his own skin, smelling the night air and doing whatever, moving wherever, his desires took him. Himself alone.

But that was not to be. They met some friends of Sarah's on the street and had to stand babbling. Willie said little—the people were schmucks as far as he was concerned. He watched Sarah; she was giggling of all things, like a teenager. That was because the people had joked about marriage, and she didn't know what to say: she was giggling and looking up at him. He scowled and saw her eyes fill up with hurt. The inquiring young man & woman, when they got no reply from Sarah and no attention from Willie, smiled as if to shrug, and moved on.

"Maybe next week!" he called after them, like a fool.

Once more in a pinch she had lapsed into girlishness and made him look the brute.

"I only want you to respect yourself," he said.

She turned in anger—"Must you *watch* me like that!"—but the anger soon faded into a kind of bewilderment that was exasperating but really, when he thought about it, did her credit. She knew what he meant, why he was forced to watch. She was not by any means dead or done.

She took his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't know what gets into me. My poor Willie, you certainly have a lot to put up with..."

But it was too late, Roger Stennis was upon them, looking five years older, bolstered by two grinning sycophants, handsome as the devil and dressed like the Duke of Wales. "Sarah!" he announced, in his bulletin-board baritone. He shook Willie's hand with a single pump, European style. He introduced his entourage, who followed suit.

"Well, old man!" Roger said.

"Well, old man!" mocked Willie.

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Roger took the mockery fondly. Good old basically loveable, irascible Willie. We know you.

"How are things down at Columbia? Department all right?"

Okay, Willie guessed.

"Be through in another year, I suppose?"

"Through?"

"Phd, I mean. The old union card."

"Well, I don't know," Willie said, though he knew very well and the answer was no. "Three years would be a pretty short trip."

But it seemed that Roger would have it in three. After his year at Oxford on the Fulbright, he would enter the new three-year program at Harvard. He had an understanding with the department there.

"Nice," Willie said.

"Yes, but it's just the externals," Roger confessed.

"What really matters is what you do with it."

"Yes."

There was a difficult pause, as though Roger had inquired what Willie had done with his two years since college, and Willie had not been able to answer. But Roger didn't have to ask. Willie would have been almost brilliant, if he were not so hopelessly hungup...

They all shook hands again.

"I envy you Paris," said Willie, honestly. What he might not learn in Paris!

"I envy you something more than Paris, Willie." Roger smiled down at Sarah, the sad, knowing smile of one who has loved well and lost, but lost only after the loving was finished and he had moved on to better things. Dear old Sarah, his smile was saying, how I hope you'll be happy. I'm really quite fond of you, you know.

And Sarah, to Willie's horror, was blushing, grinning like a little half-wit, nestling into his lapels!

Roger shook Willie's hand one more time. "Good luck, old man...the best." He meant it, too, really meant it, and Willie liked him, always had, for at least a full second.

"Oh the wonder of it all!" Willie mumbled inanely, then

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swung with all his might, smashing Roger Stennis right in the smile, knocking him off his feet and dribbling blood into his costly tie.

Sarah clung petrified to his right arm as he stood with fists clenched, waiting for Stennis to rise so he could knock him down again. But Stennis was in no hurry to rise. His friends dragged him away, heels trailing, Stennis holding a folded handkerchief to his lips and shaking his head groggily at the madness of Willie McBain, who watched after him ferocious, fists cocked, rigid and trembling in rage.

Willie and Sarah went home weeping and ashamed, and might have been good to one another had it not been for the cops waiting at the door. It seemed that the maniac Lickens had reported the Lickensmobile stolen, and suggested that the police might inquire for the thief in Philadelphia. Was this his idea of a joke? As Willie was led off furious between two brass bellies he thought for a moment of burying his elbows one to a pot and making a break for it. Alone at last! But why die? Life was awful but he was damned if he would give them the satisfaction.

Betrayed twice over, he stewed two hours in a jail cell before the stately Lickens phoned to confirm his identity. He was thinking mostly of Sarah by that time, and his thoughts swung round and round on a well-worn track. He wasn't sorry about Roger Stennis—why should he be? That had been his first clean act in months. No, it was Sarah—there was something wrong, deeper than tears could plumb, and this time he meant to have it out with her.

When he got back she was in her room with the lights out. She was still as stone but he could tell by her breathing she was not asleep. All the better. He snapped on the light and saw her stare back dry-eyed and cold, not moving a muscle.

"You're a coward," he said.

No answer.

"Well? Have anything to say for yourself? Has it been a long day?"

"It's been a miserable day." She was glaring at him as if she'd never seen him before.

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humiliate yourself at every opportunity."

"What do you want from me!" she burst out. "Humiliate! Yes, I was humiliated all right. I've never been so humiliated in my life. I was humiliated by a man who can no more control himself...no more...who strikes out like a little boy!"

"You mean, who strikes out to protect his so-called woman when she lets herself be turned into a ten-year-old girl, and likes it, revels in it! Is this what I have to expect from you? That every time there's a test you'll snuggle away like a child! Is it? Is it?"

She was crying now and yelling through her tears. "I a child! I a child! Why I felt sorry for that boy, I felt sorry and embarrassed for him! He was trying his hardest to impress you, don't you see, but you thought it was a test. You think everything's a test. You're still back in grade school, taking tests. That's what you want life to be for me, one test after another. Well I can't stand it, you hear? I don't want that kind of life! I want someone I can love and who loves me and who can live with me and be proud of me; yes, and take care of me too. I'm a woman, I'm not your boxing-partner!"

"Boxing-parner?! What does that mean? Shit! What in God's name does that mean? You want someone to be proud? Listen to me! I'll be proud of you when you can be proud of yourself. Take care of you, sure, you telling me I don't take care of you? But as a man takes care of his woman, not as a father his baby girl! I'll respect you when you have something to say for yourself, as one adult to another, when you can stand up and look people in the eye!"

"You mean *punch* people in the eye!"

"I MEAN WHAT I SAY! AND THAT'S ALL! I'M UPSET. I'M UPSET, I'M TERRIFICALLY UPSET AND YOU'RE DISTORTING EVERYTHING I SAY!"

He stepped back. He thought he was through shouting. "It's really very simple," he said. "God, how you upset me..."

She sat on the edge of the bed. She had stopped crying, and sat looking at him, eyes narrowed with hate.

"Get out," she said.

He stopped pacing. "What's that?"

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"I said get out. I don't love you anymore. I loathe you. You're not a man, you're a bad-tempered little boy. You don't want me as a woman, you want me as a roughneck sidekick to help you bully the other kids on the block."

"Listen," he said. "Some of what you say is right. OK. But what I say is very simple. I want you to be yourself. I want you to be your best. I want you to be proud so I can be proud too, of us. Because I love you. Believe me. I love you."

"You love yourself. You're talking to yourself now, you've got it all worked out. Get out of here. You disgust me." Suddenly she lost control. "I LOATHE YOU I LOATHE YOU I LOATHE YOU," she screamed, and fell weeping hysterically to the floor.

Her hysteria calmed him. He leaned to take her shoulder in his gentle hand and cupping her head smoothe her hair but she screamed GET AWAY FROM ME GET AWAY I LOATHE YOU GET AWAY!

And she twisted from him, squirmed violently, ugly, her face contorted, crawling for the door... A red screen came down before his eyes.

"DON'T YOU TALK TO ME THAT WAY!" he yelled. "DON' T YOU DARE, DON'T YOU EVER!" Before he knew he would he hit her, then when he knew hit her again, not out of malice but pure blind rage: clubbed the crawling girl clumsy blows on the head and then to the ribs, knocking her over.

He leaned back against the wall and screamed. She lay on the floor and screamed. She got to her feet, flashed him a look of indomitable hatred, ran to the bathroom and locked herself in.

When next he could speak he bellowed COME OUT OF THERE OR I'LL KNOCK YOUR GOODDAM DOOR IN! At which she shouted, vulgar as a whore, FUCK YOU YOU BASTARD GO AWAY I HATE YOU. And he said, choking. "How lovely you are!"

Then, in a little while, he called to her, "Please come out, Sarah. I'm sorry. I do love you, very much. I'm sorry for what I said." He heard no sound but her desperate weeping.

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Methodically, in a cold fury, he began to pummel the wall. And even as he smashed one ruined fist after the other weeping and swearing he knew she would love him again, she would forgive him, they would love and be together for the rest of their lives and oh how he would hate her for it.

Three Poems by Denise Levertov

AS IT HAPPENS

Like dogs in Mexico,
furless, sore, misshapen,

arrives from laborious nowhere
Agony. And proves

to have eyes of kindness,
a pitiful tail, wants

love. Give it some, in form of
dry tortilla, it

grabs and runs off
three leggéd, scared,

but tarries nearby and will
return. A friend.

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A LAMENTATION

Grief, have I denied thee?
Grief, I have denied thee.

That robe or tunic, black gauze
over black and silver my sister wore
to dance Sorrow, hung so long
in my closet. I never tried it on.
And *my* dance
was Summer—they rouged my cheeks
and twisted roses with wire stems into my hair.
I was compliant, Juno de sept ans,
betraying my autumn birthright pour faire plaisir.
Always denial. Grief in the morning, washed away
in coffee, crumbled to a dozen errands between
busy fingers.
Or across cloistral shadow, insistent
intrusion of pink sunstripes from open
archways, falling recurrent.

Corrosion denied, the figures the acid designs
filled in, Grief dismissed,
and Eros along with grief.
Phantasmagoria swept across the sky
by shaky winds endlessly,
the spaces of blue timidly steady—
blue curtains at trailer windows framing
the cinder walks.
There are hidden corners of sky
choked with the swept shreds, with pain and ashes.
Grief,
have I denied thee? Denied thee.
The emblems torn from the walls,
and the black plumes.

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THE MUTES

Those groans men use
passing a woman on the street
or on the steps of the subway

to tell her she is a female
and their flesh knows it,

are they a sort of tune,
an ugly enough song, sung
by a bird with a slit tongue

but meant for music?

Or are they the muffled roaring
of deafmutes trapped in a building that is
slowly filled with smoke?

Perhaps both.

Such men most often
look as if groan were all they could do,
yet a woman, in spite of herself,

knows it's a tribute:
if she were lacking all grace
they'd pass her in silence:

so it's not only to say she's
a warm hole. It's a word

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in grief-language, nothing to do with
primitive, not an ur-language;
language stricken, sickened, cast down

in decrepitude. She wants to
throw the tribute away, dis-
gusted, and can't,

it goes on buzzing in her ear,
it changes the pace of her walk,
the torn posters in echoing corridors

spell it out, it
quakes and gnashes as the train comes in.
Her pulse sullenly

had picked up speed,
but the cars slow down and
jar to a stop while her understanding

keeps on translating:
"Life after life goes by

without poetry,
without seemliness,
without love."

—DENISE LEVERTOV

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George Oppen: A Narrative

1

I am the father of no country
And can lie.

But whether mendacity
Is really the best policy. And whether

One is not afraid
To lie.

2

And truth? O,
Truth!

Attack
On the innocent

If all we have
Is time.

3

The constant singing
Of the radios, and the art

Of colored lights
And the perfumist

Are also art. But here

Parallel lines do not meet
And the compass does not spin, this is the interval

In which they do not, and events
Emerge on the bow like an island, mussels

Clinging to its rocks from which kelp

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Grows, grass
And the small trees

Above the tide line
And its lighthouse

Showing its whitewash in the daylight

In which things explain each other,
Not themselves.

4

An enclave
Filled with their own
Lives, they said, but they disperse

Into their jobs,
Their "circles", lose connection
With themselves... How shall they know

Themselves, bony
With age?
This is our home, the planets

Move in it
Or seem to,
It is our home. Wolves may hunt

With wolves, but we will lose
Humanity in the cities
And the suburbs, stores

And offices
In simple
Enterprise.

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5

It is a place.
Nothing has entered it.
Nothing has left it.
People are born

From those who are there. How have I forgotten...

How have we forgotten
That which is clear, we
Dwindle, but that I have forgotten
Tortures me.

6

I saw from the bus,
Walked in fact from the bus station to see again
The river and its rough machinery
On the sloping bank—I cannot know

Whether the weight of cause
Is in such a place as that, tho the depth of water
Pours and pours past Albany
From all its sources.

7

Serpent, Ouroboros
Whose tail is in his mouth: he is the root
Of evil,
This ring worm, the devil's
Doctrine the blind man
Knew. His mind
Is its own place;
He has no story. Digested

And digesting—Fool object,
Dingy medalion
In the gutter
Of Atlantic Avenue!

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Let it alone! It is deadly.
What breath there is
In the rib cage we must draw
From the dimensions

Surrounding, whether or not we are lost
And choke on words.

8

But at night the park
She said, is horrible. And Bronk said
Perhaps the world
Is horror.
She did not understand. He meant
The waves or pellets
Are thrown from the process
Of the suns and like radar
Bounce where they strike. The eye
It happens
Registers
But it is dark.
It is the nature
Of the world:
It is as dark as radar.

9

The lights
Shine, the fire
Glows in the fallacy
Of words. And one may cherish
Invention and the invented terms
We act on. But the park
Or the river at night
She said again
Is horrible.

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10

Some of the young men
Have become aware of the Indian,
Perhaps because the young men move across the continent
Without wealth, moving one could say
On the bare ground. There one finds the Indian

Otherwise not found. Wood here and there
To make a village, a fish trap in a river,
The land pretty much as it was.

And because they also were a people in danger,
Because they feared also the thing might end,
I think of the Indian songs...
"There was no question what the old men were singing"
The anthropologist wrote,

Aware that the old men sang
On those prairies,
Return, the return of the sun.

11

River of our substance
Flowing
With the rest. River of the substance
Of the earth's curve, river of the substance
Of the sunrise, river of silt, or erosion, flowing
To no imaginable sea. But the mind rises

Into happiness, rising

Into what is there. I know of no other happiness
Nor have I ever witnessed it... Islands
To the north

In polar mist
In the rather shallow sea—
Nothing more

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But the sense
Of where we are

Who are most northerly. The marvel of the wave
Even here is its noise seething
In the world; I thought that even if there were nothing

The possibility of being would exist;
I thought I had encountered

Permanence; thought leaped on us in that sea
For in that sea we breathe the open
Miracle

Of place, and speak
If we would rescue
Love to the ice-lit

Upper World a substantial language
Of clarity, and of respect.

—GEORGE OPPEN

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Avigdor Arikha

A Portfolio and an Interview
presented by Patrick Bowles

Arikha: sketch of Patrick Bowles.

Arikha: Let's say the painter begins to sing when his hand is broken.

B. Yes. Right. At that point he's absolutely no longer a commercial proposition.
A. No. At that point he tries communicating something about experience. Not merely supplying information.
B. When you said "hand" you meant the fireworks of technique, didn't you?
A. I think of the hand as the originator of perfection. But technique is very important. One doesn't think of it. It's part of your blood. The act of painting is an act of revelation. Isn't it?
B. It's an approach: if it helps you to produce a good painting, it's valid.
A. A good painting has tension. The moment of tension is the moment of revelation.
B. And a painting which hasn't any tension?
A. That's applied art.
B. When did you begin to draw?
A. At the age of five or six. Portraits from nature at the age of nine. But nothing is left. Destroyed during the war.
B. So at the time you did the concentration camp drawings you already had five or six years' experience?
A. Painting became an urgent medium.
B. Because of the visual impact of the camps?
A. I don't know. It was urgent. We saw how values can be temporal and absolutely irrelevant. But I remember more the smell and the mud. Above all the mud. Blacks and broken browns.
B. The Nazis left a message, didn't they? That all morals and human behaviour are man-made. And that nothing can stop any man from acting as he likes, in the end, unless man stops him.

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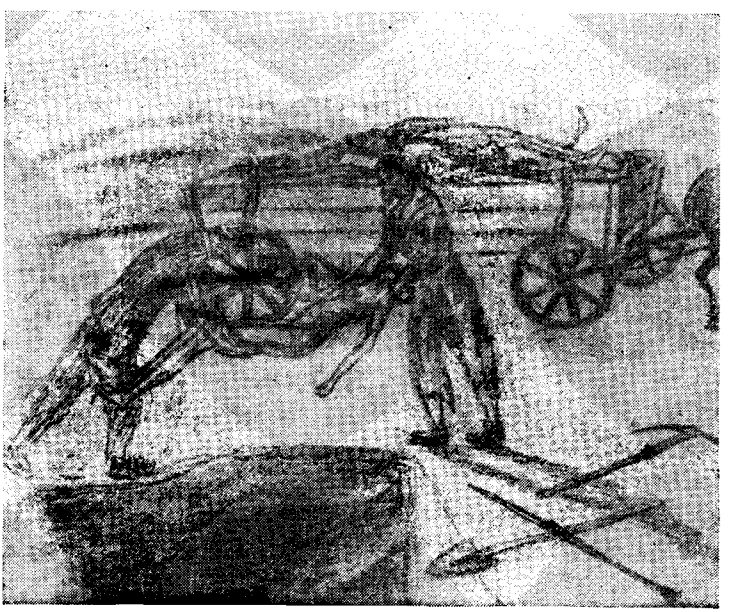
A. That's interesting. But they didn't realize it themselves and events overtook them.
B. Quite. In spite of themselves people set up life there, bargain for cigarettes, buy food and—even set up a medical service!
A. Exactly!
B. How old were you when you left the camp?
A. Fifteen. I arrived in October '41 and left in February '44.
B. Of course, you were drawing in a figurative way. It was the only way in those days.
A. Always the only way for a beginner! Abstraction is a matter of age. Like wisdom. Abstraction is wisdom of the vision. You abandon the mechanical, determined relation between what you draw and what you see.
B. When you left the camp, what did you do?
A. Kibbutz. Back to school. Haganah. Bezalel Art School, Jerusalem.
B. How was it during your schooling?
A. Up at five in the morning. Put milk cans on the car. Go to Jerusalem. Arrive at school at seven. Sleep for an hour on a bench. School started at eight. It stopped at two in the afternoon. I'd walk round the old city. It's the most beautiful, fascinating place. Then back. My Kibbutz was ten miles from Jerusalem. The highest mountain in Judea. Beautiful.



A drawing from a concentration camp, done at the age of 14. 1943. $7^1/_8 \times 8^1/_4$ in.

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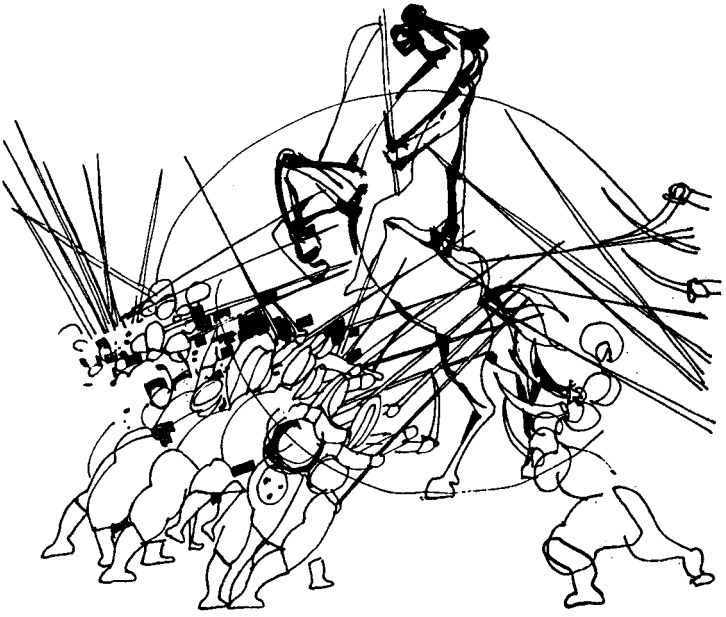
B. How long did this go on?
A. Until '48, when the war broke out, and I was wounded.
B. And then?
A. I came to Paris in September '49.
B. Still doing drawing and painting?
A. Certainly.
B. Where did you go?
A. L'Ecole-des-Beaux-Arts, studying fresco. But I was already doing my own work. My first group shows were in '49. Then in '51 I went back to Jerusalem for two years. That was when I did the illustrations for Rilke.
B. Your style was changing then; there must have been a point when you realized where it was going.
A. It broke away from the completely figurative in '54. And it started to become like this in '58. When I was twenty-nine.
B. Would you call it abstract?
A. I don't know.
B. Non-figurative?
A. A figure doesn't necessarily express a state of the soul. It's terribly difficult to escape the figure. The minute you draw or paint, you naturally draw a figure. Take Rembrandt: the first period, there are definite figures. And slowly the figures become pretexts to paint, as



A drawing from the illustrations for R.M. Rilke's Cornet. *1952. (Limited edition. Tarshish Books. Jerusalem 1953.)*

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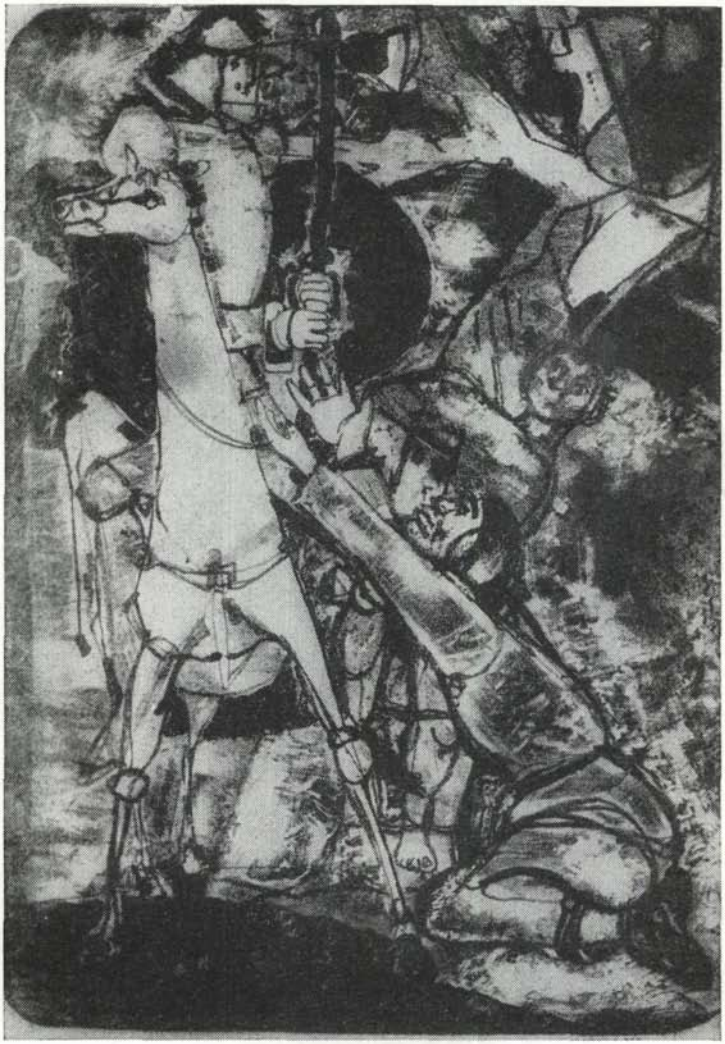

Don Quixote. Lithograph. 13 1/2 × 9 1/2 in. 1952.

when you take a theme as a pretext to sing. It doesn't matter on what. The essential thing is to sing. Art begins when it begins to sing. You don't learn it. You only learn to master your hand. Which is to do the opposite of singing! That is the tragedy with academicism.

B. There's a dilemma there, isn't there? What do you mean?

A. The painter doesn't guide his hand, but I'd say there's a dimension of the hand which he himself is guided into.

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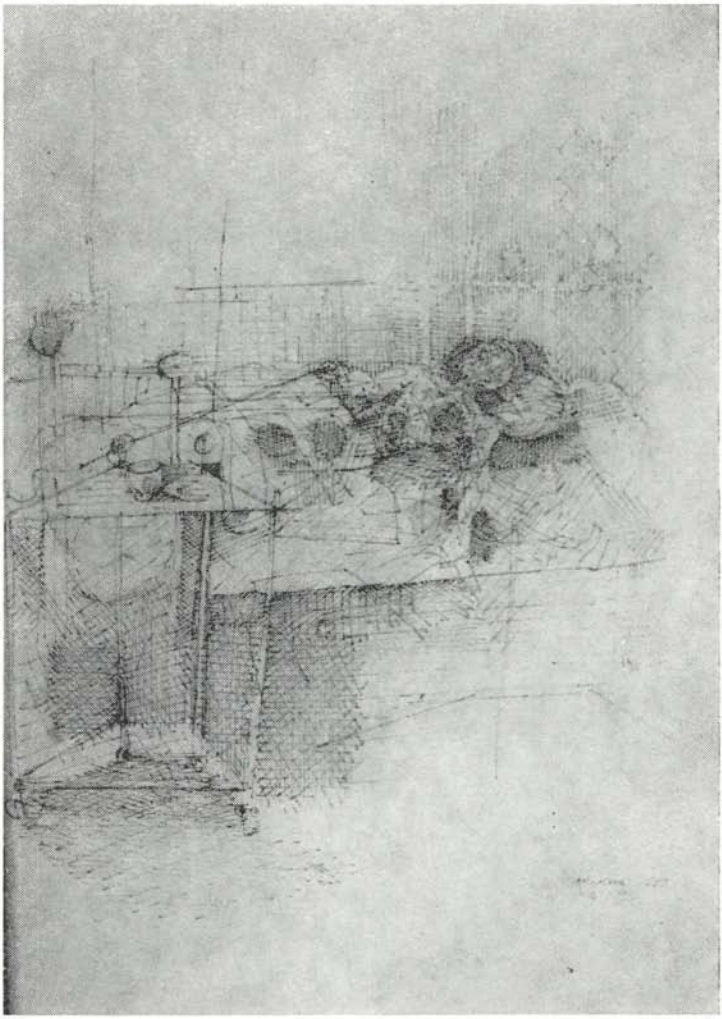

A drawing from the illustrations for Samuel Beckett, Nouvelles et Textes Pour Rien *(Limited edition, Editions de Minuit, 1957.)*

B. Was this what happened in '58, when your work broke away from what you call the determined image?
A. I hope so.
B. What do you mean by image?
A. An image is something resembling something else. Not a revealer but a reminder. A painting is a revealer.
B. How does that relate to your view of painting?

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A. A painting is not there to remind you of another subject. Or of another painting. It is immediate. An image is not immediate. It is mediate. It imitates something which it is not. Aristotle said that the highest form of imitation was music because it was the most immediate. I would wish painting to be as immediate as music. And Kant said you look at art as at nature, without categories of the reason. The general tendency is to regard painting as mere image.

B. In that case, talking about painting is a waste of time.

A. All you can say about painting is, Ah, Masaccio! Oh, what a painting!

"Tournoy". Oil on canvas. 25½ × 32 in. 1955. Collection, The Hon. Mrs. Lane Rothschild, Oxford.

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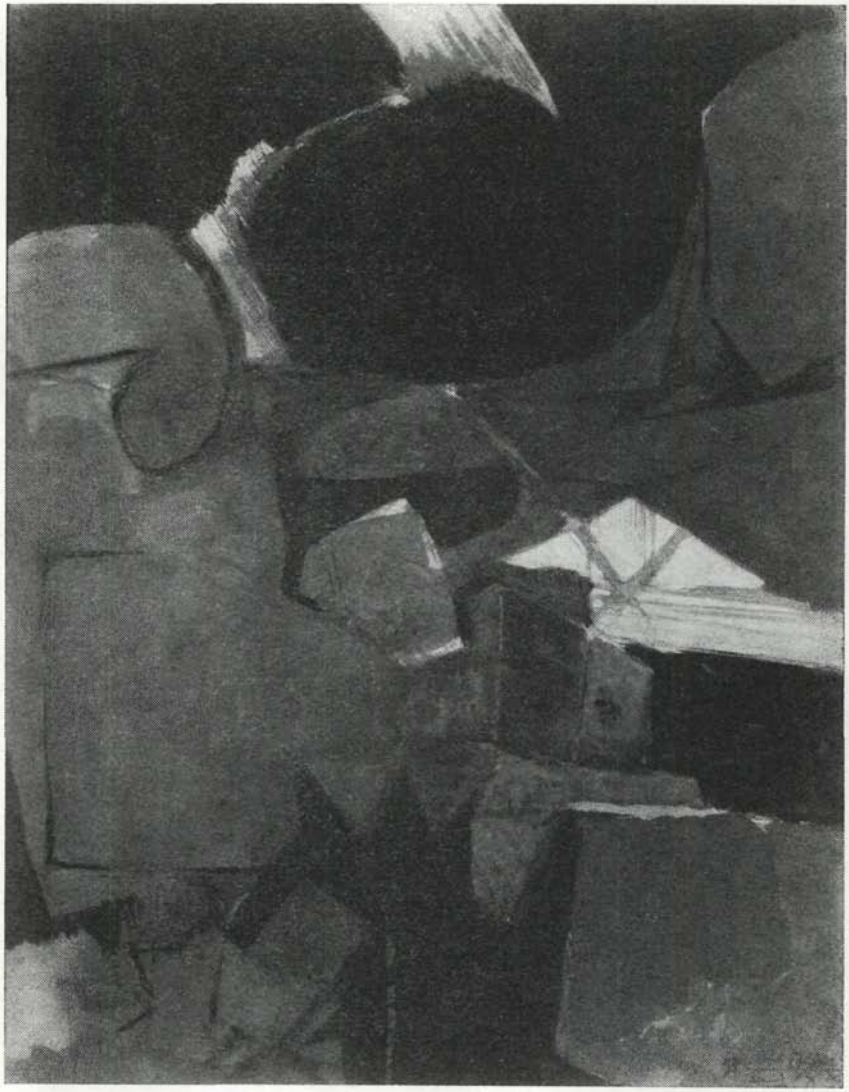

"Despair", Gouache. 25 1/4 × 19 3/4 in. 1958. Galerie Krugier & Co, Geneva.

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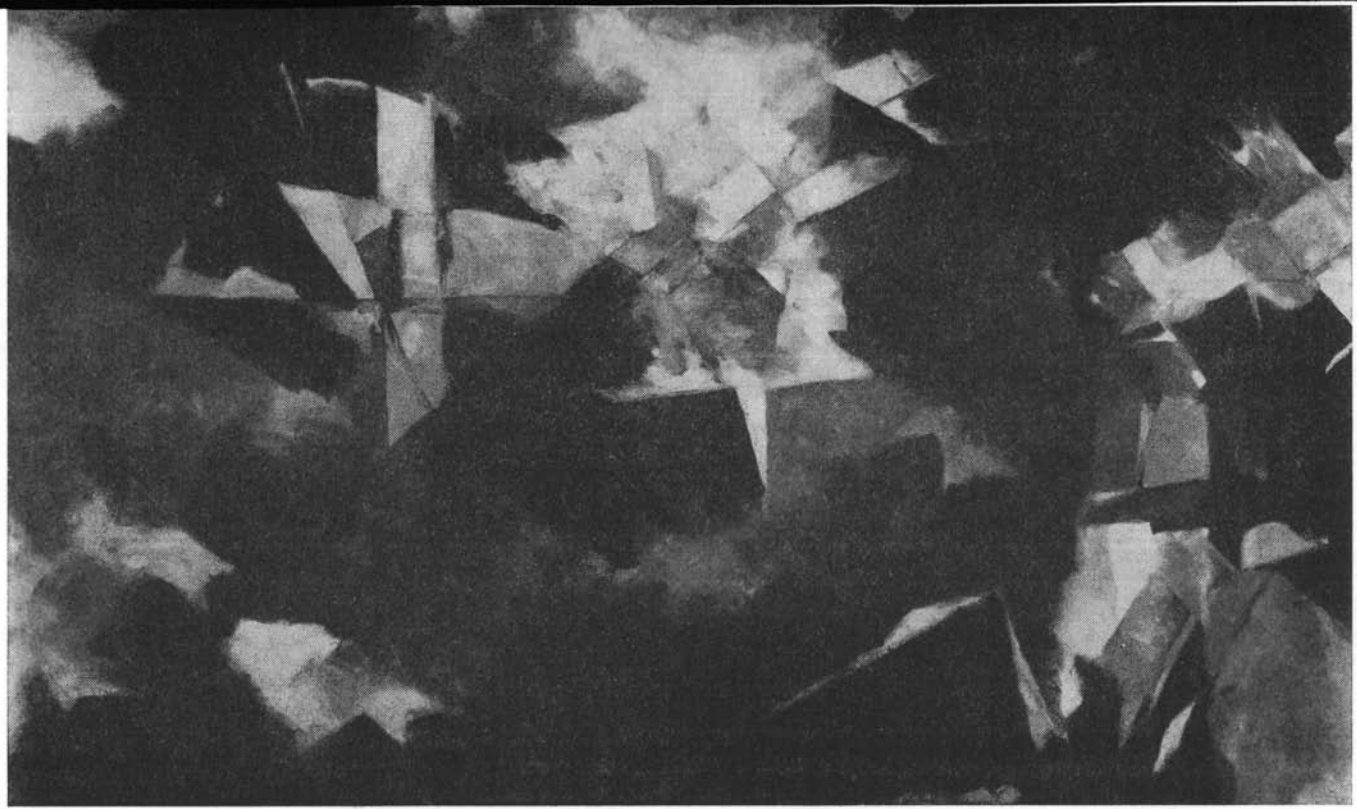

Red-Blue. Oil on Canvas. 35 × 57 1/2 in. 1961. Collection, Mr & Mrs Samuel Glaser, Boston.

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Anger

I

The time is.
The air seems a cover,
the room is quiet.

She moves, she
had moved. He
heard her.

The children
sleep, the dog fed,
the house around them

is open, descriptive,
a truck through the walls,
lights bright there,

glaring, the sudden
roar of its motor, all
familiar impact

as it passed
so close. He
hated it.

But what does she answer.
She moves
away from it.

In all they save,
in the way of his saving
the clutter, the accumulation

of the expected disorder—
as if each dirtiness,
each blot, blurred

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happily, gave
purpose, happily—
she is not enough there.

He is angry. His
face grows—as if
a moon rose

of black light,
convulsively darkening,
as if life were black.

It is black.
It is an open
hole of horror, of

nothing as if not
enough there is
nothing. A pit—

which he recognizes,
familiar, sees
the use in, a hole

for anger and
fills it
with himself,

yet watches on
the edge of it,
as if she were

not to be pulled in,
a hand could
stop him. Then

as the shouting
grows and grows
louder and louder

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with spaces
of the same open
silence, the darkness,

in and out, him-
self between them,
stands empty and

holding out his
hands to both,
now screaming

it cannot be
the same, she
waits in the one

while the other
moans in the hole
in the floor, in the wall.

2

Is there some odor
which is anger,

a face
which is rage.

I think I think
but find myself in it.

The pattern
is only resemblance.

I cannot see myself
but as what I see, an

object but a man,

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with lust for forgiveness,
raging, from that vantage,
secure in the purpose,

double, split.
Is it merely intention,

a sign quickly adapted,
shifted to make

a horrible place
for self-satisfaction.

I rage.
I rage, I rage.

3

You did it,
and didn't want to,

and it was simple.
You were not involved,

even if your head was cut off,
or each finger

twisted
from its shape until it broke,

and you screamed too
with the other, in pleasure.

4

Face me,
in the dark,
my face. See me.

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It is the cry
I hear all
my life, my own

voice, my
eye locked in
self sight, not

the world what
ever it is
but the close

breathing beside
me I reach out
for, feel as

warmth in
my hands then
returned. The rage

is what I
want, what
I cannot give

to myself, of
myself, in
the world.

5

After, what
is it—as if
the sun had

been wrong to return,
again. It was
another life, a

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day, some
time gone, it
was done.

But also,
the pleasure, the
opening

relief
even in what
was so hated.

6

All you say you want
to do to yourself you do
to someone else as yourself

and we sit between you
waiting for whatever will
be at last the real end of you.

—ROBERT CREELEY

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Pieta

Snow-white ray
coal-black earth will
swallow now.
The heaven glows
when twilight has
kissed it, but
your white face
which I kiss now does
not. Be still
acacia boughs,
I talk with my
small one. We speak
softly. Be still.

The sky is blind
with white
cloud behind
the swooping birds. The
garden lies
round us and
birds in the dead
tree's bare
boughs shut
and open themselves. Be
still, or be
your unstill selves,
birds in the tree.

The wind is
grievous to the willow. The
underside of its
leaves as the wind
compels them is
ashen. Bow

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never, nor dance
willow. How can
you bear it? My
head goes back on
my neck fighting
the pain off. Willow
in the wind, share it.
I have to learn
how time can be
passed in public
gardens. There my
dead lies idle. Much
bereaved and sitting
under a sunny wall
old women stare
through me. I
come too soon and
yet at last to
fixity, being alone and
with a crone's pastimes.

—DONALD DAVIE

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Last Spring

1

Through a dark winter
In a cold chambre de bonne
I lay still and dreamt

And as we lose our grip
On every real thing in the world
Settling for its glitter

It was of the things
Whose corpses eclipse them,
Shellfishes, ostriches, elephants.

2

But in spring the sun's
Swath of reality started going over
The room daily, like a cleaning woman,

It sent up my keepsakes,
My inventions in dust,
It left me only a life

And time to walk
Head bobbing out front like a pigeon's
Knocking on the instants to let me in.

—GALWAY KINNELL

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On The Frozen Field

We walk across the snow,
The stars can be faint,
The moon can be eating itself out,
There can be meteors flaring to death on earth,
The Northern Lights can bloom and seethe
And be tearing themselves apart all night,
We walk arm in arm, and we are happy.

You in whose ultimate madness we live,
You flinging yourself out into the emptiness,
You—like us—great for an instant,

O only universe we know, forgive us.

—GALWAY KINNELL

All For a Day

All day I have written words:
My subject has been that. Words.
And I am wrong. And the words.
I burn
Three pages of them. Words.
And the moon, moonlight, that too
I burn. —A poem remains.
But in the words, in the *words*
In the fire that is now words.
I eat the words that remain.
And am eaten. By nothing,
By all that I have not made.

—ROBERT SWARD

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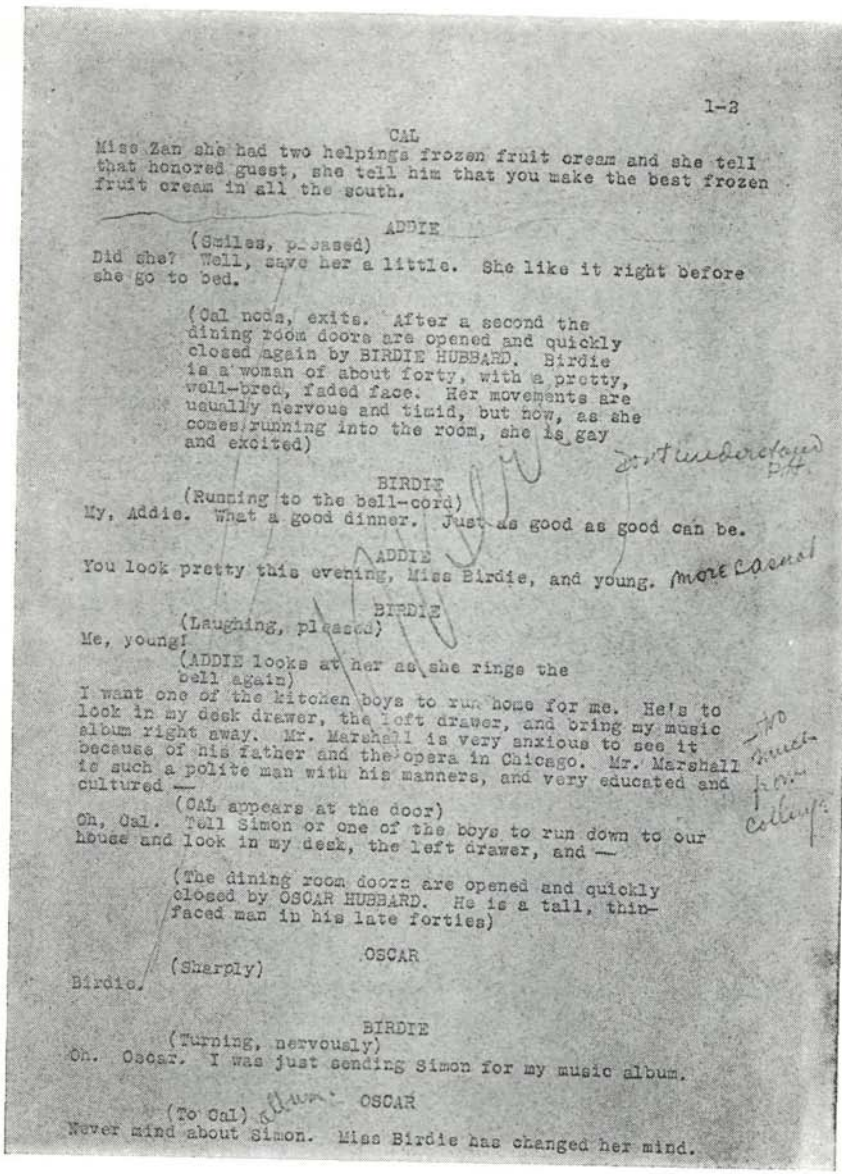

1-2

CAL

Miss Zan she had two helpings frozen fruit cream and she tell that honored guest, she tell him that you make the best frozen fruit cream in all the south.

ADDIE

(Smiles, pleased)

Did she? Well, save her a little. She like it right before she go to bed.

(Cal nods, exits. After a second the dining room doors are opened and quickly closed again by BIRDIE HUBBARD. Birdie is a woman of about forty, with a pretty, well-bred, faded face. Her movements are usually nervous and timid, but now, as she comes running into the room, she is gay and excited)

BIRDIE

(Running to the bell-cord)

My, Addie. What a good dinner. Just as good as good can be.

ADDIE

You look pretty this evening, Miss Birdie, and young.

BIRDIE

(Laughing, pleased)

Me, young!

(ADDIE looks at her as she rings the bell again)

I want one of the kitchen boys to run home for me. He's to look in my desk drawer, the left drawer, and bring my music album right away. Mr. Marshall is very anxious to see it because of his father and the opera in Chicago. Mr. Marshall is such a polite man with his manners, and very educated and cultured —

(CAL appears at the door)

Oh, Cal. Tell Simon or one of the boys to run down to our house and look in my desk, the left drawer, and —

(The dining room doors are opened and quickly closed by OSCAR HUBBARD. He is a tall, thin-faced man in his late forties)

OSCAR

(Sharply)

Birdie.

BIRDIE

(Turning, nervously)

Oh. Oscar. I was just sending Simon for my music album.

OSCAR

(To Cal)

Never mind about Simon. Miss Birdie has changed her mind.

MSS. page from The Little Foxes

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The Art of The Theater I

Lillian Hellman

An Interview

Sketch by Anne Hollander

Miss Hellman spends her summers in a comfortable white house, at the bottom of a sandbank in the town of Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, on the island of Martha's Vineyard. There is none of old Cape Cod about it; a modern house, newly built with lots of big windows and a wooden deck facing on the harbour. Miss Hellman observes the ferries of Woods Hole-Martha's Vineyard-Nantucket Steamship Authority, weighted down with passengers and automobiles, push through the harbour on their midsummer schedule and disgorge ever more visitors upon this teeming, heterogenous resort. It is a measure of Miss Hellman's dedication to her work that she achieves so much in her exposed situation, not half a mile from the ferry dock. Here she stays with her maid, and a big barking poodle that discourages few of the peak-of-the-season visitors who troop through her parlour.

Behind this new house and out of view on top of the sandbank is the old one, which Miss Hellman sold after Dashiell Hammett died.

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A frame house with yellow painted shingles and climbing roses, plainer and more regional in its architecture, like a Yankee farmhouse of the last century, it had a complex of boxlike rooms where Miss Hellman's guests thronged. Removed from these, on the far east wing of the house, stood a tower formed by the shell of an old Cape Cod windmill. Up in this windmill-tower was the room where Dashiell Hammett lived; he alwasy escaped there when company came. He had been an invalid since the war; he became a recluse and at the end of his life talked to almost nobody. Hammett was a thin, finely built man and not tall—although when he was seen walking in delicate silence, in the cruel wasting of his illness, down a crowded sidewalk on his way to the library, unrecognized, unknown, forgotten, the proudness of his bearing set him off from the summer people.

Very occasionally a stranger would come in the house uninvited and catch Dashiell Hammett off guard. He might be reading in an easy chair. Miss Hellman would introduce him, and he elegantly rise and shake hands. Like many a famous writer who detests being disturbed in his private self, a million miles from any social confrontation, he had learned to scare off the intruder with his smile. Here he was luckier than most; for rather than looking pained and fraudulent, rather than a predictable Sam Spade/Humphrey Bogart hard-guy leer, the smile Dashiell Hammett produced on his clear-eyed, lean, aristocratic face was so nearly beatific that it disarmed the intruder long enough for Dashiell Hammett, with no more than a how-do-you-do, to vanish from the room. The arm chair or the book gave his only evidence. Even the invited dinner guest coming punctually into the room would know the same ectoplasmic presence, when Miss Hellman, the laughter mingled in her greeting, would immediately explain what Dash had said—what his joking exit line had been on, it seemed, the instant of your entrance. He was elusive but never aloof. Through the medium of Miss Hellman it was possible to carry on a running extrasensory conversation. A question to him, put through to her, on one evening (as how to clean a meerschaum pipe) or a request for an opinion (on somebody's writing, on something President Eisenhower did) was sure to be answered on another. And five years ago a request was put in writing for an interview to be included in this series. He was by then at the end of his tether, often too weak to take his meals at the table. An answer came: Sor-

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ry. Don't think it would work. Lilly will explain. *Which she does, though neither by design nor coincidence, in this interview. On a table in the parlour where she talked was a framed snapshot of Dashiell Hammett as he looked in World War II as a corporal in the Army Service Forces. He is lighting his cigarette on a PX-Zippo lighter and looking every inch a soldier in his impeccably creased suntans and overseas cap tilted toward the right of his head of white hair.*

Miss Hellman's voice has a quality, not to be captured on the page, of being at once angry, funny, slyly feminine, sad, affectionate and harsh. While talking here she often allowed her laughter, like an antidote to bitterness, to break into her thoughts and give a more generous dimension to her comments which, in print, may seem at first glance merely captious. These pages are compiled from three afternoon conversations in the more than usually harrying conditions of the Labor Day weekend on Martha's Vineyard, while Miss Hellman was driving herself to finish a movie script for Sam Spiegel. There were many interruptions, telephone calls and people coming and going in the room. Such circumstances cannot excuse but may in part explain some of the interviewers' unrehearsed and too eagerly "literary" questions.

INTERVIEWER

Before you wrote plays, did you write anything else?

HELLMAN

Yes, short stories, a few poems. A couple of the stories were printed in a long dead magazine called *The Paris Comet* for which Arthur Kober worked. Arthur and I were married and living in Paris. Let's see, about 1928, 1929, somewhere in there. They were very lady-writer stories. I re-read them a few years ago. The kind of stories where the man puts his fork down and the woman knows it's all over. You know.

INTERVIEWER

Was it Dashiell Hammett who encouraged you to write plays?

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HELLMAN

No. He disliked the theater. He always wanted me to write a novel. I wrote a play before *The Children's Hour* with Louis Kronenberger called *The Dear Queen*... It was about a royal family. A royal family who wanted to be bourgeois. They kept running away to be middle class, and Dash used to say the play was no good because Louis would laugh only at his lines and I would laugh only at mine.

INTERVIEWER

Which of your plays do you like best?

HELLMAN

I don't like that question. You always like best the last thing you did. You like to think that you got better with time. But you know it isn't always true. I very seldom re-read the plays. The few times I have, I have been pleasantly surprised by things that were better than I had remembered and horrified by other things I had thought were good. But I suppose *Autumn Garden*. I suppose I think it is the best play, if that is what you mean by "like."

INTERVIEWER

Somebody who saw you watch the opening night in Paris of Simone Signoret's adaptation of *The Little Foxes* said that through the performance you kept leaving your seat and pacing the vestibule.

HELLMAN

I jump up and down through most performances. But that particular night I was shaken by what I was seeing. I like *Little Foxes*, but I'm tired of it. I don't think many writers like best their best known piece of work, particularly when it was written a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER

What prompted you to go back to the theme and the characters of *The Little Foxes?* Only seven years later you wrote *Another Part of The Forest*.

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HELLMAN

I always intended to do *The Little Foxes* as a trilogy. Regina in *The Little Foxes* is about thirty-eight years old, and the year is 1900. I had meant to take up with her again in about 1920 or 1925, in Europe. And her daughter, Alexandra, was to have become maybe a spinsterish social worker, disappointed, a rather angry woman.

INTERVIEWER

In the third act of *The Little Foxes* is a speech which carries the burden of the play. It says there are people who eat the earth and all the people on it, like the locusts in the Bible. And there are the people who let them do it. "Sometimes I think it ain't right to stand by and watch them do it." At the end of this play Alexandra decides that she is not going to be one of those passive people. She is going to leave her mother.

HELLMAN

Yes, I meant her to leave. But to my great surprise, the ending of the play was taken to be a statement of faith in Alexandra, in her denial of her family. I never meant it that way. She did have courage enough to leave, but she would never have the force or vigor of her mother's family. That's what I meant. Or maybe I made it up afterwards.

INTERVIEWER

These wheelers and dealers in your plays—the gouging, avaricious Hubbards. Had you known many people like that?

HELLMAN

Lots of people thought it was my mother's family.

INTERVIEWER

Might you ever write that third play?

HELLMAN

I'm tired of the people in *The Little Foxes*.

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INTERVIEWER

In *Regina*, the opera Marc Blitzstein based on *The Little Foxes*, the badness of Regina is most emphatic.

HELLMAN

Marc and I were close friends but we never collaborated. I had nothing to do with the opera. I never saw Regina that way. You have no right to see your characters as good or bad. Such words have nothing to do with people you write about. Other people see them that way.

INTERVIEWER

You say in your introduction that *The Children's Hour* is about goodness and badness.

HELLMAN

Goodness and badness is different from good and bad people, isn't it? *The Children's Hour*— I was pleased with the results—was a kind of exercise. I didn't know how to write a play and I was teaching myself. I chose, or Dashiell Hammett chose for me, an actual law case, on the theory that I would do better with something that was there, had a foundation in fact. I didn't want to write about myself at the age of twenty-six. The play was based on a law case in a book by William Roughead... I changed it, of course, completely, by the time I finished. The case took place in Edinburgh in the nineteenth century, and was about two old-maid school teachers who ran a sort of second-rate private school. A little Indian girl. an India Indian, had been enrolled by her grandmother in the school. She brought charges of lesbianism against the two teachers. The two poor middle-aged ladies spent the rest of their lives suing, sometimes losing, sometimes winning, until they no longer had any money and no school.

INTERVIEWER

As a rule does the germ of a play come to you abstractly? Do you work from a general conception?

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HELLMAN

No, I've never done that... I used to say that I saw a play only in terms of the people in it. I used to say that because I believed that is the way you do the best work. I have come now to think that is it people *and* ideas.

INTERVIEWER

Have characters invented themselves before you write them?

HELLMAN

I don't think characters turn out the way you think they are going to turn out. They don't always go your way. At least they don't go my way. If I wanted to start writing about you, by page ten I probably wouldn't be. I don't think you start with a person. I think you start with the parts of many people. Drama has to do with conflict in people, with denials... But I don't really know much about the process of creation and I don't like talking about it.

INTERVIEWER

Is there something mysterious in what a play evokes as art and the craft of writing it?

HELLMAN

Sure. That is really the only mystery because theories may work for one person and not for another. It's very hard, at least for me, to have theories about writing.

INTERVIEWER

But you had to begin with a clear idea of what the action of the play would be?

HELLMAN

Not always. Not as I got older. It was bright of Hammett to see that somebody starting to write should have a solid foundation to build on. It made the wheels go easier. When I first started to write I used to do two or three page outlines. Afterwards, I didn't.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think the kind of play you do—the well made play, one which runs the honest risk of melodrama for a purpose—is going to survive?

HELLMAN

I don't know what survives and what doesn't. Like everybody else, I hope I will survive. But survival won't have anything to do with well-made or not well-made, or words like melodrama. I don't like labels and isms. They are for people who raise or lower skirts because that's the thing you do for this year. You write as you write, in your time, as you see your world. One form is as good as another. There are a thousand ways to write, and each is as good as the the other if it fits you, if you are any good. If you can break into a new pattern along the way, and it opens things up, and allows you more freedom, that's something. But not everything, maybe even not much. Take any form, and if you're good—

INTERVIEWER

Do you have to do with the casting of your plays?

HELLMAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel you were well served always?

HELLMAN

Sometimes, sometimes not. *Candide*, *My Mother, My Father And Me* were botched, and I helped to do the botching. You never know with failures who has done the harm. *Days To Come* was botched. The whole production was botched, including my botching. It was an absolute horror of a failure. I mean the curtain wasn't up ten minutes and catastrophe set in. It was just an awful failure. Mr. William Randolph Hearst caused a little excitement by getting up in the middle of the first act and leaving with his party of ten. I vomited in

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the back aisle. I did. I had to go home and change my clothes. I was drunk.

INTERVIEWER

Have you enjoyed the adaptations you have done of European plays?

HELLMAN

Sometimes, not always. I didn't like Anouilh's *The Lark* very much. But I didn't discover I didn't like it until I was half-way through... I liked *Montserrat*. I don't seem to have good luck with adaptations. I got nothing but pain out of *Candide*. That's a long story.... No, I had a good time on *Candide* when I was working alone. I am not a collaborator. It was a stormy collaboration. But I had a good time alone.

INTERVIEWER

Candide was a box office failure, but obviously it was a success. The record is very popular.

HELLMAN

It has become a cult show. It happens. I'm glad.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think *My Mother, My Father and Me* was a cult show?

HELLMAN

It opened during the newspaper strike, and that was fatal. Yes, I guess we were a cult show. Oddly enough, mostly with jazz musicians. The last week the audience was filled with jazz musicians. Stan Getz had come to see it and liked it, and he must have told his friends about it. I hope it will be revived because I like it. Off Broadway. I had wanted it done off-Broadway in the beginning.

INTERVIEWER

Can you comment on your contemporaries—Arthur Miller?

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HELLMAN

I like *Death Of A Salesman*. I have reservations about it, but I thought it was an effective play. I like best *View From The Bridge*.

INTERVIEWER

After The Fall?

HELLMAN

So you put on a stage your ex-wife who is dead from suicide and you dress her up so nobody can mistake her. Her name is Marilyn Monroe, good at any box office, so you cash in on her, and cash in on yourself, which is maybe even worse.

INTERVIEWER

In an important sub-plot of this play a man who was once briefly a Communist names a close friend before a congressional committee.

HELLMAN

I couldn't understand all that. Miller felt differently once upon a time, although I never much liked his House Un-American Committee testimony: a little breast-beating and a little apology. And recently I went back to reread it and liked it even less. I suppose, in the play, he was being tolerant: those who betrayed their friends had a point, those who didn't also had a point. Two sides to every question and all that rot.

INTERVIEWER

And Tennessee Williams?

HELLMAN

I think he is a natural playwright. He writes by sanded fingertips. I don't always like his plays—the last three or four seem to me to have gone off, kind of way out in a conventional way. He is throwing his talent around.

INTERVIEWER

Mary McCarthy wrote in a review that you get the feeling that no matter what happens Mr. Williams will be rich and famous.

HELLMAN

I have the same feeling about Miss McCarthy.

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INTERVIEWER

She has accused you, among other things, of a certain "lubricity," of an overfacility in answering complex questions. Being too facile, relying on contrivance.

HELLMAN

I don't like to defend myself against Miss McCarthy's opinions, or anybody else's. I think Miss McCarthy is often brilliant and sometimes even sound. But, in fiction, she is a lady writer, a lady magazine writer. Of course, that doesn't mean that she isn't right about me. But if I thought she was, I'd quit. I would like critics to like my plays because that is what makes plays successful. But a few people I respect are the only ones whose opinions I've worried about in the end.

INTERVIEWER

There is a special element in your plays—of tension rising into violence. In *Days To Come* and *Watch On The Rhine* there are killings directly on stage. Was there possibly, from your association with Dashiell Hammett and his work, some sort of influence, probably indirect, on you?

HELLMAN

I don't think so, I don't think so. Dash and I thought differently and were totally different writers. He frequently objected to my use of violence. He often felt that I was far too held up by how to do things, by the technique. I guess he was right. But he wasn't writing for the theater and I was.

INTERVIEWER

You have written a lot of movies?

HELLMAN

Let's see. I wrote a picture called *The Dark Angel* when I first started. I did the adaptation of *Dead End*. I did the adaptation of *The Little Foxes*. Right now I'm doing a picture called *The Chase*.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you ever worry about Hollywood being a dead end for a serious writer?

HELLMAN

Never. I wouldn't have written movies if I'd thought that. When I first went out to Hollywood one heard talk from writers about whoring. But you are not tempted to whore unless you want to be a whore.

INTERVIEWER

The other night when we listened to Peter Seeger sing his folk songs you seemed nostalgic.

HELLMAN

I was moved by seeing a man of conviction again.

INTERVIEWER

We aren't making them like that any more?

HELLMAN

Not too many. Seeger's naivete and the sweetness, the hard work, the depth of belief I found touching. He reminded me of very different times and people. There were always x number of clowns, x number of simple-minded fools, x number of fashionables who just went along with what was being said and done, but there were also remarkable people, people of belief, people willing to live by their beliefs. Roosevelt gave you a feeling that you had something to do with your government, something to do with better conditions for yourself and for other people. With all its foolishness the thirties were a good time and I often have regrets for it. Many people of my age make fun of that period, and are bitter about it. A few do so out of a genuine regret for foolish things said or foolish things done—but many do so because belief is unfashionable now and fear comes with middle-age.

INTERVIEWER

Do people still mention your statement before the House

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Un-American Activities Committee, "I can't cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions"?

HELLMAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Did that put you in contempt of Congress?

HELLMAN

No, I never was in contempt. They brought no contempt charges at the end of that day. My lawyer, Joseph Rauh, was so proud and pleased. He was afraid I would be harmed because I might have waived my rights under the Fifth Amendment.

INTERVIEWER

You took the stand that you would tell the Committee all they wanted to know about you, but you weren't going to bring bad trouble upon innocent people no matter if they had been fooled?

HELLMAN

We sent a letter* saying that I would come and testify about myself as long as I wasn't asked questions about other people. But the Committee wasn't interested in that. I think they knew I was innocent, but they were interested in other people. It was very common in those days, not only to talk about other people, but to make the talk as interesting as possible. Friendly witnesses, so called, would often make their past more colorful than ever was the case. Otherwise you might turn out to be dull. I thought mine was a good position to take—I still think so.

INTERVIEWER

Was it something of a custom among theater people in those days, when they were going to name some old acquain-

* Following the interview is the text of this letter. The Committee rejected the proposal contained in the letter.

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tance to a committee, to call him beforehand and let him know? Just to be fair and square, as it were?

HELLMAN

Yes. They would telephone around among their friends. In several cases the to-be-injured people actually gave their permission. They understood the motive of their friends' betrayal—money, injury to a career. Oh, yes, there was a great deal of telephoning around. Kind of worse than testifying, isn't it?—the fraternity of the betrayers and the betrayed. There was a man in California who had been barred from pictures because he had been a Communist. After a while he was broke, this Mr. Smith, and his mother-in-law who was getting bored with him—and anybody would have been bored with him—said that he could have a little piece of land. So he started to build a two-room house, and he borrowed the tools from his closest friend, his old college room-mate, Mr. Jones. He had been working on his house for about seven or eight months and almost had it finished when Mr. Jones arrived to say that he had to have the tools back because, he, Mr. Jones, was being called before the Committee the next day and was going to name Mr. Smith and thought it was rather unethical for Mr. Smith to have his tools while he was naming him. I don't know whether the house ever got finished... Clowns, they were.

INTERVIEWER

A little known aspect of Lillian Hellman is that she was the inspiration for Dashiell Hammett's Nora Charles, the loyal wife of Nick Charles, the detective-hero of *The Thin Man*. That marriage is beautifully evoked in the book and was played by William Powell and Myrna Loy in the movies.

HELLMAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't it give you some gratification?

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HELLMAN

It did, indeed.

INTERVIEWER

When Myrna Loy turned into her, then she became the perfect wife.

HELLMAN

Yes. I liked that. But Nora is often a foolish lady. She goes around trying to get Nick into trouble.

INTERVIEWER

And that was about you both?

HELLMAN

Well, Hammett and I had a good time together. Most of it, not all of it. We were amused by each other.

INTERVIEWER

Was it because of that book that Gertrude Stein invited you to dinner?

HELLMAN

Miss Stein arrived in America and said that there were two people that she wanted to meet. They were both in California at that minute—Chaplin and Dash. And we were invited to dinner at the house of a friend of Miss Stein; Charlie Chaplin, Dash and myself, Paulette Goddard, Miss Toklas, our host and hostess and another man. There was this magnificent china and lace tablecloth. Chaplin turned over his coffee cup, nowhere near Stein, just all over this beautiful cloth, and the first thing Miss Stein said was, "Don't worry, it didn't get on me." She was miles away from him. She said it perfectly seriously. Then she told Dash he was the only American writer who wrote well about women. He was very pleased.

INTERVIEWER

Did he give you any credit for that?

HELLMAN

He pointed to me, but she didn't pay any attention. She wasn't having any part of me. I was just a girl around the

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table. I talked to Miss Toklas. We talked about food. It was very pleasant.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know Nathaniel West?

HELLMAN

He managed a hotel, the Sutton Hotel. We all lived there half-free, sometimes all-free. Dash wrote *The Thin Man* at the Sutton Hotel. Pep West's uncle or cousin owned it, I think. He gave Pep a job out of kindness. There couldn't have been any other reason. Pep liked opening letters addressed to the guests. He was writing, you know, and he was curious about everything and everybody. He would steam open envelopes, and I would help him. He wanted to know about everybody.

Dash had the Royal Suite—three very small rooms. And we had to eat there most of the time because we didn't have enough money to eat any place else. It was awful food, almost spoiled. I think Pep bought it extra cheap. But it was the depression and I couldn't get a job. I remember reading the manuscript of *Balso Snell* in the hotel. And I think he was also writing *Lonelyhearts* at that time. Dash was writing *The Thin Man*. The hotel had started out very fancy—it had a swimming pool. I spent a good deal of time in the swimming pool... I had nothing else to do with myself.

Then the Perelmans* bought a house in Bucks County. We all went down to see it. There was a dead fish in a closet. I don't know why I remember that fish. Later we would all go down for weekends, to hunt. I have a snapshot of the Perelmans and Dash and me and Pep and Bob Coates.

Even in a fuzzy snapshot you can see that we are all drunk. We used to go hunting. My memory of those hunting trips is of trying to be the last to climb the fence, with the other guns in front of me, just in case. Pep was a good shot. He used to hunt with Faulkner. So was Dash.

INTERVIEWER

Did Faulkner come around a lot in those days?

* S. J. Perelman was West's brother-in-law.

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HELLMAN

Faulkner and Dash liked each other. Dash's short stories were selling, the movies were selling. So we had a lot of money, and he gave it away and we lived fine. Always, he gave it away—to the end of his life when there wasn't much, anymore. We met every night at some point for months on end, during one of Faulkner's New York visits. We had literary discussions. A constant argument about Thomas Mann. This must have taken up weeks of time.

INTERVIEWER

Was Faulkner quiet?

HELLMAN

He was a gallant man, very southern. He used to call me Miss Lillian. I never was to see him much after that period, until a few years ago when I saw him a couple of times. We remembered the days with Dash, and he said what a good time in his life that was and what a good time we had had together.

INTERVIEWER

Was any play easy to write?

HELLMAN

Autumn Garden was easier than any other.

INTERVIEWER

At the very end of the play, the retired general, Griggs, makes one of the rare speeches in your plays that is of a remotely "philosophic" nature.

HELLMAN

Dash wrote that speech. I worked on it over and over again but it never came right. One night he said, "Go to bed and let me try." Dash comes into this interview very often, doesn't he?

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INTERVIEWER

"That big hour of decision, the turning point in your life, the someday you've counted on when you'd suddenly wipe out your past mistakes, do the work you'd never done, think the way you'd never thought, have what you'd never had, it just doesn't come suddenly. You trained yourself for it while you waited—or you've let it all run past you and frittered yourself away."

HELLMAN

Yes, the basic idea was his. Dash was hipped on the subject. I think I believe that speech... I know I do... Dash worked at it far harder than I ever have, as his death proved. He wasn't prepared for death, but he was prepared for the trouble and the sickness he had, and was able to bear it, I think because of this belief, with enormous courage, and quietness.

INTERVIEWER

What is the sensation the writer has when he hears his own words from the mouth of somebody else? Of even the most gifted actor?

HELLMAN

Sometimes you're pleased and the words take on meanings they didn't have before, larger meanings. But sometimes it is the opposite. There is no rule. I don't have to tell you that speech on the stage is not the speech of life, not even the written speech.

INTERVIEWER

But do you hear dialogue spoken when you are writing it?

HELLMAN

I guess I do. Anyway, I read it to myself. I usually know in the first few days of rehearsals what I have made actors stumble over, and what can or cannot be cured.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have disputes with actors who want their lines changed?

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HELLMAN

Not too many. I took a stubborn stand on the first play and now I have a reputation for stubborness.

INTERVIEWER

Is that because you have written always to be read, even more than to be acted?

HELLMAN

Partly. But I had learned early that in the theater, good or bad, you'd better stand on what you did. In *Candide* I was persuaded to do what I didn't believe in, and I am no good at all at that game. It wasn't that the other people were necessarily wrong, I just couldn't do what they wanted. With age, I guess, I began to want to be agreeable.

INTERVIEWER

Would you mind if your plays were never produced ever again but only read?

HELLMAN

I wouldn't like it. Plays are there to be acted. I want both.

INTERVIEWER

The famous Hemingway dialogue, the best of it, turns to parody when actors speak it verbatim in adaptations of his work.

HELLMAN

That's right. It shows up, it shows up. That's just what I meant by listening to the actor. Writing for the theater is a totally different form. But then, if you want to be good and hope people will also read the plays, then it becomes a question of making sure the two forms come together. Very often in the printed form, you must recast a sentence. I do it—when I'm not too lazy—for the published version. But in minor ways, like changing the place of a verb, or punctuation. I overpunctuate for theater scripts.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think the political message in some of your plays is more important than the characters and the development?

HELLMAN

I've never been interested in political messages, so it is hard for me to believe I wrote them. Like every other writer I use myself and the time I live in. The nearest thing to a political play was *The Searching Wind*, which is probably why I don't like it much any more. But even there I meant only to write about nice, well born people who, with good intentions, helped to sell out a world.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe this was one play in which you were more concerned with a situation of crisis than with your characters?

HELLMAN

Yes. But I didn't know that when I was writing it. I felt very strongly that people had gotten us into a bad situation—gotten us into a war that could have been avoided if Fascism had been recognized early enough.

INTERVIEWER

What were you doing in those war years?

HELLMAN

In 1944 I was invited by the Russians to come on a kind of cultural mission. Maybe because they were producing *Watch On The Rhine* and *The Little Foxes* in Moscow.

INTERVIEWER

What were those productions like?

HELLMAN

The Little Foxes was an excellent production. *Watch on The Rhine* was very bad. I had thought it would be the other way around. I would go to rehearsals of *Watch on The Rhine* with

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Serge Eisenstein and when I made faces or noises, he would say, "Never mind, never mind. It's a good play. Don't pay any attention to what they are doing. They can't ruin it." I saw a great deal of Eisenstein. I was very fond of him.

INTERVIEWER

When did you discover that you could no longer earn money by writing for the movies?

HELLMAN

I learned about the blacklisting by accident in 1948. Wyler and I were going to do *Sister Carrie*. Somebody, I think Mr. Balaban, told Wyler that I couldn't be hired. That unwritten, unofficial, powerful blacklist stayed in effect until two or three years ago.

INTERVIEWER

Weren't you offered clearance if you would sign something? If you made an appropriate act of contrition?

HELLMAN

Later. Shortly after the first blacklisting I was offered a contract by Columbia Pictures—a contract that I had always wanted—to direct, produce and write, all three or any. And a great, great deal of money. But it came at the time of the famous movie conference of top Hollywood producers... They met to face the attacks of the Red-baiters and to appease them down. A new clause went into movie contracts. I no longer remember the legal phrases, but it was a lulu. I didn't sign the contract.

INTERVIEWER

What did you think about what was happening?

HELLMAN

I was so unprepared for it all, so surprised McCarthy was happening in America. So few people fought, so few people spoke out. I think I was more surprised by that than I was by McCarthy.

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INTERVIEWER

People in the theater or pictures?

HELLMAN

Yes and literary people and liberals. Still painful to me, still puzzling. Recently I was asked to sign a protest about Polish writers. I signed it, it was a good protest, I thought, and went out to mail it. But I tore it up when I realized not one of the people protesting had ever protested about any of us.

INTERVIEWER

What did you think was going to happen?

HELLMAN

I thought McCarthy would last longer than he did. I thought the whole period would be worse and longer than it was. You know, I was very worried about Dash. He was a sick man and I was scared that he might go back to prison and get sicker—I lived for a long time in fear that he would go back and not get good medical treatment and be alone and—But jail hadn't worried him much or he pretended it hadn't. It amused him to act as if jail was like college. He talked about going to jail the way people talk about going to college. He used to make me angry...

INTERVIEWER

The Maltese Falcon was taken off the shelves of the *USIS* libraries when Roy Cohn and David Shine were riding high. Dashiell Hammett was called before Senator McCarthy's committee.

HELLMAN

Yes. It was on television and I watched it. They called Dash, and Dash was a handsome man, a remarkably handsome man, and he looked nice. One of the Senators, I think McCarthy, said to him, "Mr. Hammett, if you were in our position, would you allow your books in *USIS* libraries?" And he said,

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"If I were you, Senator, I would not allow any libraries." A good remark. McCarthy laughed. Nobody else did, but McCarthy did... Dash had an extremely irritating habit of shrugging his shouders. For years I would say, "Please don't shrug your shoulders." I don't know why it worried me, but it did. He was shrugging his shoulders like mad at the committee. He'd give an answer, and he'd shrug his shoulders with it. And when he was finished and got to the airport he rang me up and said, "Hey, how did you like it? I was shrugging my shoulders just for you."

INTERVIEWER

Did that period—and its effect on people—appeal to you as a subject?

HELLMAN

I've never known how to do it. It was really a clownish period. It was full of clowns talking their heads off, apologizing, inventing sins to apologize for. And other clowns, liberals, who just took to the hills. Ugly clowning is a hard thing to write about. Few people acted large enough for drama and not pleasant enough for comedy.

INTERVIEWER

Then you went to England to do a movie?

HELLMAN

I used to try to explain that it wasn't as bad as they thought it was. And it wasn't. They were exaggerating it because they don't always like us very much. So much talk about fascism here and how many people were in jail. The only time I ever met Richard Crossman, he didn't know I knew Hammett. Hammett was in jail, and Crossman said what a disgrace that was. "What's the matter with all of you, you don't lift a finger for this man? It couldn't happen here, we'd have raised a row." I told him I had lifted a finger.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever think of living abroad as other Americans were doing?

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HELLMAN

I was tempted to stay in England, but I couldn't. I like this country. This is where I belong. Anyway, I don't much like exiles. But I used to try to persuade Dash to go away, just to save his life. He had emphysema. He caught tuberculosis in the First World War and emphysema in the Second. He had never been to Europe. He used to laugh when I suggested his leaving here. He had a provincial dislike of foreigners, and an amused contempt for Russian bureaucracy. He didn't understand all of our trotting around Europe. Thought it was a waste of time.

INTERVIEWER

Did he laugh at the idea that they admired him over there?

HELLMAN

No. He liked it but it didn't interest him much. When I told him that Andre Gide admired him, he made a joke which you can't print in this family magazine.

INTERVIEWER

Let's be bold.

HELLMAN

All right. He said, "I wish that fag would take me out of his mouth."

INTERVIEWER

Who did he want to admire his work?

HELLMAN

Like most writers he wanted to be admired by good writers. He had started off as a pulp writer, you know, and had a wide audience—He wrote a lot for a pulp mystery magazine, *The Black Mask*. But I believe Dash took hemself very seriously as a writer from the beginning.

INTERVIEWER

He helped you with your work. Did you help him with his?

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HELLMAN

No, No.

INTERVIEWER

Did he show you his novels while he was writing them?

HELLMAN

The Thin Man and some stories, and a novel unfinished at his death. The other novels were written before I met him.

INTERVIEWER

But he worked very painstakingly with you, on your work.

HELLMAN

Oh yes, and was very critical of me. The rules didn't apply the other way. I had many problems writing *The Little Foxes*. When I thought I had got it right, I wanted Dash to read it. It was five o'clock in the morning. I was pleased with this sixth version, and I put the manuscript near his door with a note, "I hope *this* satisfies you." When I got up, the manuscript was outside my door with a note saying, "Things are going pretty well if you will just cut out the liberal black-amoor chit-chat."

INTERVIEWER

He meant the Negro servants talking?

HELLMAN

Yes. No other praise, just that.

INTERVIEWER

So you knew you were all right?

HELLMAN

No, I wrote it all over again... He was generous with anybody who asked for help. He felt that you didn't lie about writing and anybody who couldn't take hard words was about to be shrugged off, anyway. He was a dedicated man about writing. Tough and generous.

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INTERVIEWER

Was he always reasonably successful?

HELLMAN

Oh, no. He earned a kind of living at first, but pulp magazines didn't pay much. He was not really discovered until shortly before I met him, in 1930. He had been writing for a long time.

INTERVIEWER

He read constantly?

HELLMAN

Enormously. He had little formal education. He quit school at thirteen to work. He was the most widely read person I ever knew. He read anything, just anything. All kinds of science books, farm books, books on making turtle traps, tying knots, novels—He spent almost a year on the retina of the eye. I got very tired of retinas. And there was a period of poisonous plants and Icelandic sagas and how to take the muddy taste from lake bass. I finally made a rule that I would not listen to any more retina of the eye talk or knot talk or baseball talk or football talk.

INTERVIEWER

Do you consider yourself to be closely tied to the theater and to "theater people"?

HELLMAN

In the early days I didn't think it out, but I stayed away from them. I was frightened of competing. I felt that the further I stayed away, the better chance I had. No, I don't know too many theater people.

INTERVIEWER

A man, who has known both breeds, said that on the whole writers are even more narcissistic and nastier and more competitive than people in show biz.

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HELLMAN

Hard to know the more or less. But people in the theater are usuallly generous with money and often with good-will. Maybe the old troopers world—having to live together and sharing. Writers are interesting people, but often mean and petty. Competing with each other and ungenerous about each other. Hemingway was ungenerous about other writers. Most writers are. Writers can be the stinkers of all time, can't they?

INTERVIEWER

The playwright knows dangers that are different from those the novelists know?

HELLMAN

Yes, because failure is faster in the theater. It is necessary that you not become frightened of failure. Failure in the theater is more dramatic and uglier than in any other form of writing. It costs so much, you feel so guilty. In the production of *Candide*, for the first time in my life, I guess, I was worried by all this. It was bad for me.

INTERVIEWER

Writing about the Lincoln Center Repertory in *The New York Review of Books*, Elizabeth Hardwick said that the trouble with the present theater is that it is all professionalism and is divorced from literature.

HELLMAN

Yes, of course she was right. There shouldn't be any difference between writing for the theater and writing for anything else. Only that one has to know the theater. Know it. To publish a novel or a poem one doesn't have to know print types or the publishing world. But to do a play, no matter how much one wishes to stay away from it, one has to *know* the theater. Playwrights have tried to stay away, including Shaw and Chekov, but in the end, they were involved. Chekov used to send letters of instructions and angry notes. A play is not only on paper. It is there to share with actors, directors, scene designers, electricians.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you believe there are many talented writers working at present?

HELLMAN

Yes, but nothing like the period when I was very young, in the twenties. That was a wonderfully talented generation, the one before mine. But, you know, I think there's talent around now. Maybe not great talent, but how often does that occur anyway? It is good that we have this much. And there are signs now of cutting up. They are not always to my taste, but that doesn't matter. Cutting up is a form of belief, a negative expression of it, but belief.

INTERVIEWER

The hard professionalism in writers of that generation, like Ring Lardner, Dashiell Hammett or Dorothy Parker, seems very unfashionable now. Young writers take themselves very seriously as highbrows and artists.

HELLMAN

The writer's intention hasn't anything to do with what he achieves. The intent to earn money or the intent to be famous or the intent to be great doesn't matter in the end. Just what comes out. It is a present fashion to believe that the best writing comes out of a hophead's dream. You pitch it around and paste it up. So sentimental.

INTERVIEWER

Sentimental or romantic?

HELLMAN

Romantic and sentimental. I am surprised, for example, at the sentimentality in much of Genet, and surprised that people are romantic enough not to see its sentimentality. I mean a sentimental way of looking at life, at sex, at love, at the way you live or the way you think. It is interesting that the "way-out" is not the sharpness of a point of view or the toughness,

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but just tough words and tough actions, masking the romantic. Violence, in space, is a romantic notion. Anti-bourgeois in an old fashioned sense.

INTERVIEWER

Philip Rahv said the old idea of *epatisme* is dead. You can no longer scandalize the bourgeois. He may be vicious about defending his property; but as to morality, he is wide open to any and all nihilistic ideas.

HELLMAN

Yes, indeed. He has caught up. That is what words like "the sexual revolution" mean, I guess—the bourgeois sexual revolution. I agree with Philip. Epataying is just a sticking out of the tongue now, isn't it? The tongue or other organs.

INTERVIEWER

You have seen a lot of the contemporary theater in Europe. How does it compare with ours?

HELLMAN

The British have more talented young men and women than we have here, but I doubt if they are major talents. Genet and Ionesco are interesting men, but they are not to my taste in the theater. Beckett is the only possibly first-rate talent in the world theater. But he must grow larger, the scale's too small. We don't know much about the Russian theater. Obviously, it hasn't produced good playwrights. Certainly, not when I was there. But Russian production, directing and acting are often wonderful. But that's a dead end. When the major talents are directors, actors and scene designers—that's dead end theater. Fine to see, but it ain't going nowhere. You have to turn out good new writers.

INTERVIEWER

What about the revival of Brecht?

HELLMAN

Brecht was the truest talent of the last forty or fifty years.

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But a great deal of nonsense has been written about Brecht. Brecht himself talked a great deal of nonsense. Deliberately, I think. He was a showman and it is showmanlike in the theater to have theories. But that doesn't matter. What a wonderful play *Galileo* is. Writers talk too much.

INTERVIEWER

What do you want to do next?

HELLMAN

I am going to edit that anthology. I had a struggle with myself because Dash would not have wanted it. He didn't want the short stories printed again. But I decided that I was going to have to forget what he wanted. Someday even the second copyrights will expire and the stories will be in public domain. I don't really know why he didn't want them reprinted—maybe because he was too sick to care. It will be a hard job. I have already started the introduction and I find it very difficult to write about so complex a man, and even I knew so little of what he was. I am not sure I can do it in the end, but I am going to have a try. But I don't know his reasons. Probably when you're sick enough you don't care much. He went through a bad time...

—JOHN PHILLIPS

—ANNE HOLLANDER

* * *

May 19, 1952

Honorable John S. Wood
Chairman
House Committee on Un-American Activities

Dear Mr. Wood:

As you know, I am under subpoena to appear before your Committee on May 21, 1952.

I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. I have nothing to hide from your Committee and there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed.

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I have been advised by counsel that under the Fifth Amendment I have a constitutional privilege to decline to answer any questions about my political opinions, activities and associations, on the grounds of self-incrimination. I do not wish to claim this privilege. I am ready and willing to testify before representatives of our Government as to my own opinions and my own actions, regardless of any risks or consequences to myself.

But I am advised by counsel that if I answer the Committee's questions about myself, I must also answer questions about other people and that if I refuse to do so, I can be cited for contempt. My counsel tells me that if I answer questions about myself, I will have waived my rights under the Fifth Amendment and could be forced legally to answer questions about others. This is very difficult for a layman to understand. But there is one principle that I do understand: I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal or subversive.

* * *

But to hurt innocent people whom I know many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group.

* * *

I am prepared to waive the privilege against self-incrimination and to tell you anything you wish to know about my views or actions if your Committee will agree to refrain from asking me to name other people. If the Committee is unwilling to give me this assurance, I will be forced to plead the privilege of the Fifth Amendment at the hearing.

A reply to this letter would be appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Lillian Hellman

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And in my Heart

R. V. Cassill

They came across like a flood when the traffic light changed, the girls in sweaters with books shelved in their folded arms and the wind fiddling with their hair, the young men in shirtsleeves or fieldjackets, bareheaded or wearing canvas hats. Toward the time when the campanile bell would ring two o'clock, they had loitered out as couples or little groups from the restaurants and rooming houses, until they jammed the corner opposite the campus with a nearly amorphous concentration of movement. Except for linked arms here and there and a few couples holding hands, the bodies in the crowd did not quite touch. Nevertheless, when the light turned green something to be felt like a physical drag swept them all in a single direction and carried Orin Corrigan with them over to the diverging campus walks.

A girl in a plaid skirt shouldered into him, looked up with innocent, hard eyes. After she had reasoned that such an old man must be a professor, she said, "Par me", and trotted ahead of him as if she counted on pure hurry to bring her up with friends sooner or later.

Corrigan took the same walk as she and watched the distance between them increasing. He saw her fat little hips work comically under the plaid until she was screened from sight by a crossing flow of students. I wasn't really laughing at her, he thought, turning right to avoid the crowd—nor at any of their genitive fashions. I was laughing because to my *eye* all this never changes. It was only the decrepitude of the body and the heart's deliverance from longing that registered change.

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To the naiveté of his senses the school year seemed to begin as years had begun for a very long time now. Once again the drying elm leaves and the autumnal brassiness of the sky kept a silence for him over the babble of the students surging toward their first classes. Under the changeless sky their rhythm and tone seemed exactly what it had been when he first came along this walk in 1921. He was a student himself then, but had been no more a part of them than he was now. Then he was, if you please, a cowboy from Western Nebraska who had never been farther from home than Fort Riley, where he served a short hitch in the cavalry. He had come to the University with a new black suit from Denver wrapped in paper at the bottom of his suitcase, wearing that same black suit nearly every day through his first three years. He had worn it on this very sidewalk, his hands hanging raw and big and awkward from the sleeves like the token burdens of his separation from the others. He was older than they, even then, almost thirty when he enrolled as a Freshman here. He was also taller than most and had the habit of walking with his head thrown back a little—partly from shyness, partly to catch the air and the overhead sights, and partly because it had once seemed a poetic stance.

His unaltered habit of alertness let him hear and see—no clearer after all these years of expectancy—the shrill harmony the unknown students made with such a day. The emotional part of his imagination transposed it to an entity crowded with wings and horns that blew the failing seasonal magic, the dignity of youth, and the dignity of their faithful ignorance as it clattered on under such a sky.

Well, well, well... he had caught this much of meaning before, so many times. He had come to the University first because he caught—like a tall snowman catching snowballs in the face—so many things which beat up his emotions and which he meant to write down as poetry. And when it came right down to it, he had stayed too long because he had never quite managed to find the verbal shapes for what he knew. There had been no failure of initial vision, he

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thought soberly, but a failure of language, a failure to convert. The passage of thirty-odd years had clarified and then accomodated that failure.

Quite a lot of years ago he had published two volumes of verse—*Ranger Ballads* and *Days West*. Nice things had been said about the books when they were new. For a little while in the late Twenties he had been a figure on the national literary scene. He was one of the "younger poets" compared rather favorably with Sandburg, Masters, and Lindsay. That was fine—worth what it was worth. His wife had been proud of his position, though by the time he had married Gail his little bit of fame was already fading into the past. To the end of her life Gail believed that he had "contributed something" to American poetry and he was glad she thought so. But for him the illusion that his published work mattered went with everything else, whistled away by the knowledge that he had never learned to write out the best things he knew.

It was not in his nature to be bitter about this failure. The effort to write had carried him high enough to see life better than he could have if he had not tried. If there were no words of his own for *all this*, there was, like an armory open to him, poetry to borrow for the expression of his reverence. He might have "gone farther" as some of his colleagues said if he had not learned here so awfully much of the poetry on the library shelves. He thought what he had learned worth the price of ambition. He had got what he needed most.

For two steps he limped as the shock of remembered words met the shock of his straining senses. "And in my heart how deep, unending, ache of love..." For every detail of it all, he thought—these kids, the weather, the disastrous neo-classic buildings of the main campus, the post-prandial mellowness of his bowels. Armed with the verse he could confront the mystery of the day without a shadow of dread.

A workman on top of Sedley Hall threw down a handful of leaves from a choked raingutter. They fell separating and flashing yellow from the height of the building. A few struck among the vines on the wall and then tumbled after the others

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like a shower of notes from stringed instruments. *Beauty momentary in the mind... but in the flesh it is immortal.* Stevens' paradox might be a game of wit for some of his younger colleagues. As for himself, he believed it. Leaves fell and his good young wife was dead and their beauty for having been, was immortal. What had been was the unchangeable and everlasting. In truth—through the truth of poetry—what had been was enough for a man and left no room for anguish. He had lived close to despair when Gail died two years before. She had so much not wanted to die and that was worse than death itself, and she had gone before he had patiently taught her that neither of them quite needed to be what she had always wanted and sometimes imagined them to be. "A little too soon," he had thought in a terrible sacriligious rebellion against her death.

But finally he knew better than that. In the very incompleteness of life was its immortality—a tricky and worthless enough immortality without poetry to illuminate it, he supposed. But there was poetry, and in it the whole story was told, finished, rounded to completeness. The true aspiration was not to alter or add to it, but to rise through emulation to the point at which it could be grasped. That was all he must slyly teach his class. He must urge them on the way toward the inevitable and welcome submission to the loss of the world. He must never tell them toward what it was that they must aspire.

II

His beginning class in writing was waiting for him in the room directly above his office. He knew two of the boys from the spring semester of his Chaucer class. Good boys and he had seen some—well, uh—*promising* verse that each of them had done. They would add nothing, ever, to literature, but they would know better what it was from their diligent efforts. The others were all strangers to him. The leavings from Moore Tyburn's class, he supposed. He had not gone to registration this year, but it did not require

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bitterness for him to believe that most of these—provided they were really serious about their work—would have preferred to leap right into Tyburn's advanced class and probably would be there if Tyburn had accepted them.

The girl sitting next to the door had the library's ancient red copy of *Days West* on the arm of her chair where he could not help seeing it. She bit decisively at her nails as he walked past her to his chair.

"Now then," he said, swinging his chair to face them and crossing his long legs. "I want to tell you how glad I am to have you with me this semester. I'm a little surprised, though, on a day like this that you would come to class. Perhaps I'm a little disappointed. Independent spirits ought to spend a day like this inviting their souls and confounding academic conformities."

The nailbiter giggled and nodded to show that she was going to be fast on the uptake for his humor.

"Bu-ut, since you have accepted the yoke, here we are in what I want to be a verray, verray informal circle. We're all here because we want to learn what we can about writing. Naturally I include myself when I say that. The University says I am your teacher. But you know how universities are. They like to set up chains of command, like the Army, while literature is maybe not even a republic but an anarchy..."

The boy to his left, the Jewish boy in a fieldjacket and suntan pants was watching him cynically through the fingers on which he rested his face. Obviously he was thinking, What a lot of horsehockey. Clearly this boy was one of Tyburn's rejects, doomed to miss and to resent missing—Tyburn's incisive explication of all the levels of each student's work. Noting the boy's disrespect for what he had said, Corrigan liked him at once.

But he went on evenly with his familiar banalities, "...only eleven of us altogether, and we want to speak with perfect frankness about our work with each other. We'll all read our work aloud in class. I've been working on some verses that I'd like to expose. And I hope that we'll all put aside any feeling that an honest criticism of what we write is, ah,

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an equivalent of an assault on anyone's chastity."

Again the nailbiter giggled helpfully. From under his lids Corrigan glanced at the other three girls. Two of them were smiling with ordinary tolerance. The beautiful girl in the corner sat as though she had not heard—in fact, as though she were not listening to anything he said. Her face was as perfect and lustrous as china, and except for its excellent shapes seemed just that expressionless. Her pale hair was drawn back with a lavender ribbon so that her ears were exposed, and these, Corrigan saw, had an extraordinary translucency. Glass ears and glass eyes, he thought, wondering why she had come to his class. It was part of his belief that beautiful women never wrote much or well, nor wanted to.

"... I have no lectures for you. Rather than ramble on like this through the period, I'd rather make a game of having each of you write a description of... well, of a tree. That sounds trivial for your talents, but it will serve for a beginning. Write about any tree you've seen or imagined. We don't want to admit that only God can make a tree. Everyone shall put forth his own leaves in this class. With hints from nature, of course..." He waved his hands in a coaxing signal for them to get ready, set, and go.

He gave them a quarter hour and when they were finished the papers were passed around the circle of chairs to him. He leafed quickly down through the pile, his eye alert for something that might set them arguing. The top paper began, "My tree is a friend..." Oh, oh. From the nailbiter, he guessed. Perhaps when she felt more at ease in the class she would do better.

"Ah, here's something interesting," he said. He extracted the paper and held it up. "Whose prose?"

"Mine." The boy in the fieldjacket flipped up one finger from his chair arm to identify himself.

"Mr. Forest. Steve Forest," Corrigan read. "I'll read Mr. Forest's description of a tree to the class and the rest of you will be preparing to criticize it as I read. Now," he said, hitching his feet back under his chair, readying himself for the sport.

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"The tree looked like a broken hand. Every branch had been cut by shrapnel. Some of the branches were ripped off clean, but most of them hung by fibers like tendons sticking through skin. The stripped trunk looked like a patient idiot who has been beaten a long time and doesn't understand why. There were axe marks on the trunk which were still bleeding a clotted sap. The ocean clouds behind it looked like scabs floating in a bucket of mucous." As he read the last simile, Corrigan let his voice rise up theatrically. "There!" he said. "There we have something to talk about. What do you think of this bit of writing... Miss Emery?" He had picked a name at random from the class roll.

The nailbiter answered. "Why... why... *goodness*!" She had expressed herself so adequately that all of them laughed. "It doesn't sound like just a tree, I mean," she said, and the laugh went around again.

"Mr. Kelsey."

"Mmmm. I liked it. It's kind of Wastelandish."

"Mr. Jost."

"I think it has its *own kind* of power. I think you *see* this. I think he gets you to sort of know what kind of tree it is he means."

"I don't *see* it," Miss Emery said, bold from her previous success. "Is it an elm or a maple? Ha. *What* kind?"

Corrigan saw the blaze of Forest's contempt leap toward the nervous girl and diverted it by saying, "Mr. Forest, you might like to tell us..."

"I think *this girl* simply doesn't want to see it."

"I certainly don't," Miss Emery snapped. "There's nothing objective about it."

"Let's have another opinion," Corrigan said. He swung his glance around the circle and picked out the beautiful girl. He indicated that she was to speak.

"I... I... I... don't feel well," she said. The class roared its delighted approval.

But the girl got up and raced for the door. She was barely past it when Forest jumped up and followed her out. The rest of the class watched with various shades of amusement

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and sympathy.

Corrigan dismissed them all soon afterward, diverting their thought from the little episode as well as he could. He anticipated the problem the girl might have in forcing herself to come back, and like an animal trainer quieting his beasts he called up the tricks learned from many years of teaching to blur down and unfocus their curiosity. By the time they all left, he felt that he had been, as far as he could be, successful in his attempt.

But his own curiosity was caught on the spike of a single question. That was, why it had been Forest who had followed her. Forest and the girl had been sitting on opposite sides of the room. He had caught no sign of familiarity between them, and, granting that Forest might be the kind of rambunctious boy who would try to shoot all the quail in the class, still, following a girl when she is about to be sick is an unpromising approach, he thought. Maybe it was pure compassion or even guilt on Forest's part.

Half-amused, he thought of Forest following the girl with remorse and saying to her, "I'm sorry I wrote that tree for you. Look, I'll write you another, with green, green leaves and a little toy wind monkeying around with it..." He had liked Forest, and he rather hoped this was the way it might turn out.

As he dawdled in the class room then, Forest came back. The boy seemed to want to say something and Corrigan waited. Forest gathered up his books and then crossed the room to gather those the girl had left.

"We must grant a certain *power* to your prose," Corrigan said gently. "Is the young lady all right? Or did she vanish? Seems a very ethereal creature. Not quite of this world."

"Of this world, all right," Forest said bitterly. "I told her not to come in this class. But I'll be damned if her being here is going to keep me from writing the way I please. And to hell with all the other bastards, too."

"Why... why..."

Corrigan saw the boy's brown eyes fixed on him with reckless begging. "... why they all mean well," he assured

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Forest. "They may be sort of amateur in their standards, but they mean well. They can help you. They... I take it you know this young lady?"

"My wife," Forest said, his beggarly eyes shifting now as if he could not meet even Corrigan's gentle gaze.

"Wife? I didn't see any Mrs. Forest on the roll," Corrigan said. "But then I miss things."

"Elaine Biddle," Forest said. "The two-day bride. We're not living together. She only came into this class because she's damn sure she's going to get at me. If I could've got in..."

Forest stopped with clumsy abruptness, but Corrigan finished the sentence for him. If Forest could have got in Tyburn's class, the wife, parasite, nemesis—what was she, then?—would have been kept out where she belonged by Tyburn's vigorous standards. Out of the realm of art where this boy thought he was scrabbling for a foothold. But in Corrigan's catch-all class, open to all comers, she was very much a presence to be reckoned with.

"I'll be glad to hear more about all this," Corrigan said encouragingly. "But I don't feel we can exclude her—if that's the problem."

"It isn't that," Forest said. "It isn't that. It's so god damn much more than that."

"If I can help..."

"You can't help," Forest said. "Only I may drop your class, too. Nobody can help." Abruptly he turned and stalked out.

But he's taking her books to her, Corrigan noted. He sighed as he started back to his office. He felt a faint, undefinable disappointment at Forest's outburst. He liked the boy so well that he wished him beyond self pity.

III

Moore Tyburn was doing the talking. It seemed that from his strategically placed easy chair in the corner of the Franklins' living room he had been talking for a very long time;

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his speech had the quality of a monologue that must have had its true beginning not only hours or days but years before this little gathering of professors and their wives had assembled in the house of the head of the English Department.

He sat under a modish floor lamp, drinking from time to time from a glass of milk that the wife of Professor Peltus kept constantly refilled for him. He finished a story about Dylan Thomas and the old days "at the Horse" with a contemptuous, final remark about the degeneration of this tavern in the Village since Thomas's death. "No one goes there any more," he said.

"We were there just two weeks ago," Mrs. Peltus said, with a half-defiant, half-apologetic snicker. "Just to *see* it. It seemed to be full of tourists and phonies."

"Oh?" Tyburn asked her coldly, as if she had no qualification for distinguishing phonies from genuines.

This was Tyburn's first year on the faculty. He had lectured here at the university once during the past winter—following Corrigan's recommendation—and Professor Franklin and the executive committee of the department had been enough impressed by him to invite him back as a member of the staff. The courses he taught were not so much designed to supplant those that Corrigan had taught for many years as to extend them. "We need someone who's really in touch with the new things. A writer, and preferably from New York," Corrigan himself had said in recommending Tyburn's appointment.

For some years Tyburn had been the associate editor of a formerly Trotskyite literary review, some of whose editors had moved on to write for LIFE and TIME while others had carried the light to campuses as far from home as the West Coast. Even physically he was a fascinating little figure, with an aggressive, blue-bearded chin that flashed metallically when he spoke, over-sized and bulging eyes that never met those of the person to whom he was talking but swung with a swift and hungry question to that person's face as soon as his gaze was averted, and a wide curving brow that seemed to perspire constantly. The fashion of his speech, in which

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he kept "denying intellectual responsibility" to this or that person of national reputation and referring knowingly to "the old man" when he meant Trotsky, had an almost hypnotic fascination for the faculty wives who were listening. An air of barely suppressed wrath in every sentence charged his whole performance with something of the tension to be felt on a hot day before a hail storm. The milk he was consuming seemed to yield a higher, immediate caloric result than the alcohol the others were drinking.

Corrigan shared the fascination of the others as he listened. From years back he had been an admirer of Tyburn's poetry and—with reservations—of his critical articles on Joyce, Thomas, Lowell and others. He liked to see the young man in action—and note with a sleepy irony the kind of sparks he struck from Mrs. Peltus and from the "liberal" Mrs. Thorne, whom Tyburn exposed quickly as a "Stalinoid", denying her intellectual responsibility between two sips of milk.

But before very long he began to sense that he had made a mistake in coming to this room to sit at the young man's feet (figuratively; actually he was clear across the room, in shadow, and being as quiet as an old man can be who has taken enough good Scotch whiskey to feel it numb his senses). He had talked with Tyburn before and they had got along with reasonable smoothness. But now as the evening progressed he began to hear, through the passion of Tyburn's broken monologue, some allusions he could only take as personal, whatever the others in the room made of them.

"One great trouble we had at the Review," Tyburn was saying, "was simply that so many of our hopeful contributors don't realize that Walt Whitman is dead." He paused for effect, rolling his ballbearing eyes toward the molding on the walls. "It's past mid-century and, believe it or not, that sloppy old influence is still alive. People who come from Chicago, and..." He shook them off the back of his hand like sweat. "You've no idea of the suffering the editorial staff goes through reading poems in praise of Lake Michigan or Abraham Lincoln, or some new Spoon River. It's true. That this country should continue to raise hillbilly poets is prob-

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ably fated. Fatal. A historic necessity. But oh dear. Oh dear. The wasted effort that could be applied to, say, swabbing out latrines. Crappers. I mean the increment of sheer defiled paper—excuse the pun—I mean is enough by itself to delay the building of a literature. And no choice left us. We can't rely on Europe any more. You know how Sartre's been groveling, groveling. And there's all this crud to clear away. Masters"—here he dropped his head into his spread hand as if he was going to cry, shook himself and hissed, "Masters. If the sonofabitch was here I'd hit him in the face. I'd *hit him in the face.*" He struck his knee with his clenched fist. "I blame it all on Masters even more than Whitman. I once went to the trouble to find out where Masters was buried, and I made a pilgrimage there. I went there to spit on his grave. Regionalism. It was too much. Porkbarrel poetry. And there are still those people who try to imitate Masters."

Mrs. Peltus, her face aglow, poured him another glass of milk. "Masters was one of my favorite poets—*when I was in high school,*" she confided naughtily.

In the center of the room Professor Peltus shuffled his feet and coughed. "That's very interesting. You would agree with James' remark in, I believe, *The Art of the Novel,* in which he says he sees no reason why the acceptance or rejection of a duke shouldn't be more interesting than, say, a lady with a cicatrice or, say, the adventures of Jeeter Lester's daughter. Not of course that James had read Caldwell. I'm merely using that as an illus..."

"People aren't talking so much about James now," Tyburn said ominously. "But exactly. The smell of horse dung does not automatically make literature. But what a long time that theory rode in the saddle. Hey. You see I'm using the regionalist lingo myself. Help. I'm drowning."

Belatedly sensing that the stage had been set for a debate—an *interesting* debate—between Tyburn and Corrigan, Peltus said, "What do you think of that, Orin? Your interests have always been more or less regional. Not that Professor Corrigan as a poet *was* a regionalist," he said with a castrated chuckle.

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"I've read his books," Tyburn said sharply. He was not going to allow quarter.

"Bu-u-ut," Peltus said, oblivious, "he was something of a fore-runner of the regionalism that developed here—in the Thirties. Never a part of it, but..."

"I think..." Orin Corrigan said slowly, setting his empty glass on the rug and pulling his legs under him. (Then, in a moment of terror, he did not know what he thought. There was an absence, as if the growing nausea and resentment with which he had been listening to Tyburn had reached the edge of a precipice and fallen over into an untraceable darkness. Recovering with a burst of anger as if adrenalin had been spilled into his bloodstream he thought, This slick, tormented little bastard has always from grade school up had to assert his own superiority by running something else down, and doesn't even know he's doing it. He's got his little yellow teeth in the butt of something marching to power and he doesn't mean to let go. He'll hang on for the ride the way ten years ago he would have held onto Henry James and twenty to Regionalism. And he's got enough teeth to hang on tight. More than enough. If you heard—*heard*—what he said about Masters and still think he's a fit person to discuss things with, then nothing I can say or have ever said in the twenty years you've been my student and been on the staff with me will make any difference.)

He said, breaking with his thought as the thought had broken angrily with the darkness beyond the precipice of surrender, "Will you pass me—or, no, would you fill my glass, Mrs. Dillon. Scotch and water. Thank you. I think that Regionalism had its weaknesses."

Did they—did any of them—realize how baldly Tyburn's remarks about Masters had been meant as a thrust at him? Evidently not. And in a smeared moment of self-pity he stared at Tyburn and asked, silently, Why? Because he had written and published a few poor poems a long time ago. If they were so bad—and no doubt they were—then they might be allowed to die out gently, as such things always would. Poems didn't even take up much space in the world's

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room. Let them go, at least, in their obscure corner. But he knew, intuitively and with a fear he could not wholly understand, that Tyburn did not mean to let them die so quietly. They would have to be ridiculed and hounded from the minds of men. He did not, just then, hate Tyburn, but with a great gasp of despair he recognized Tyburn as a pattern of things to come. He would be the new power on the English staff here. His sharp tongue and his hate would mold these opinionless men and women—these Peltuses.

Blind among enemies, Orin Corrigan thought as he drank his Scotch and water down swiftly. Then the corrective intelligence in him changed this modestly so he thought, Only, I am the one that wrote *Sweet Grass Bend* and *Crazy Horse is Dead*—not either *Lycidas* or *Paradise Lost*. That's not my line. I didn't write it, so it's not my line. Great Jesus, men who were not poets (practising) could claim, in their anguish, the great things Milton said. But once you went in the ring, you had to fight there with your own.

"Now in your class in writing..." Tyburn said challengingly, sensing his advantage, meaning to pin the old man to the wall. His voice was exultant, triumphant as a steel rasp hitting pith.

"It hasn't been awfully successful," Corrigan said. "None of my students ever published much." He groped his way to his feet, nodding and smiling and thinking that he might have acquitted himself better if he had not had that last Scotch.

Outside, the maudlin, red moon shone on the streets and through the frames of branches. There was an extravagance of longing and of inhuman loneliness in its color.

But don't write about that, Corrigan thought. He felt giddily drunk and tired and ashamed of both these things. Don't write about the moon, the seventeen miles of grass that lie between Emerald and Dumont or the way young men used to ride it (before that war, before that *Strange Thing* Phelps Putnam called it when the talking rats of Europe came and carried us all off from what we were) singing and

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passing back and forth a bottle of moonshine on a night like this, with the same moon, or how one of those got killed the next day in a Regionalistic manner by the brother of the girl he fooled. Who said they would marry in a month and a day? Don't write about such things or some sonofabitch from New York will ridicule you for it some time. Maybe he ought to pass that bit of wisdom on to his writing class.

I could go back and sock the little bastard, he thought, reeling against the wall of a building and recovering himself.

Without realizing it, he was downtown in the heart of the traffic of the little city that lived off the college. He saw the door of a bar which was as purely anonymous to him as any could possibly be. A Platonic bar. He went inside and had two more drinks while his suppressed rage against Tyburn swung tormentingly against himself. It was no one else's strength but merely his own weakness and failure that was hard to face. It was hard to endure the change of things where the best that you had known and done became, in the slow metamorphosis of time, the unmistakeable sign of what you had missed. Some devilish spirit of justice impelled him to think that Tyburn must be right. What had been the truth was changed and new things were true.

Suddenly he realized with shame that he had slid off the seat of the booth and was sitting on the floor without strength to raise himself. The waiter was supporting him so he would not fall flat.

"You got to watch that forty rod," the waiter said. "Work up on it more easy, Professor."

He knows me and I ought to know him, Corrigan thought. But as far as he could tell he had never seen the waiter before in his life. When the waiter helped him shakily to his feet, he managed a small laugh and said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd call me a cab."

Looking around now as he had not when he came into the bar, he saw that from a nearby booth two of the young men from his class, Forest and Kelsey, were watching him with a sort of skeptical compassion. He grimaced and waved to them before he waddled out. He did not think they had been

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laughing at him, but that made very little difference. They had seen. He had lost something to them that he could not well afford to give up.

At the door of his apartment he thought, miserably, If Gail were here the whole smeared evening could still be made all right and its misfortunes be given the quality of an ultimately joyful farce. I'd go reeling in to tell her how beautiful the night is, he thought, and that all the sonsofbitches in the world don't count. But she wasn't there and they did.

IV

For the first two months of the Fall semester, the beautiful girl, Elaine Biddle, handed in exactly nothing to Corrigan. He made no formal demands on any of his students for any particular volume of work, preferring to let them go at their own speed, concentrating his critical assistance on the best of what was brought to him in the belief that the encouragement and examination of excellence would do all that could be done to lead the stragglers.

But the Biddle girl—or Mrs. Forest, whichever might be the truer name for her—gave no sign that she ever meant to hand anything in. She came regularly to class and sat always in the same chair. Once she had found her place she seemed to sink into that beautiful remoteness which isolated her as a bell glass would have from the rest of them. It was not that she was utterly speechless or expressionless—when one of the other students had read aloud his production, a poem or a short story, and Corrigan called on her to comment about it, she would open her pink lips to deliver a brief cliché of praise. When the rest of the class laughed or grew excited in argument, an extremely faint smile or furrowing of her sleek brow would indicate that she heard and was acknowledging from very far away the concerns that the others met so frankly.

It was clear by now that Forest—her husband, in a legal sense at least—was a center of interest or sometimes a storm center of the class. When Miss Emery read a story of her own

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about the adventures of two girls on a bus, Forest announced immediately that it was "Crap." Whereupon Miss Emery had fled the classroom in tears and Forest had tried to cover his real consternation over this result by an impassioned attack on all stories that had surprise endings. When Forest read his own work—he had read two stories thus far—Miss Emery got her own back by saying they were certainly very much like the stories of James Farrell, if *that* was what he had been aiming at. Scabs in a bucket of mucous, *indeed*!

Well, it certainly was what he was aiming at, Forest told her, only to write a better prose than Farrell's. And the whole class—except his wife—slambanged into an argument about realism, naturalism, and the happiness of most human beings.

She only watched, from her china blue eyes, as though she were looking in at the rest of them through the bars of a cage. She had no opinion to offer.

And finally Corrigan concluded that she was not in the class because she wanted to write—whatever her motive for being there might be. It was partly curiosity that moved him to keep her after class one day when the others had left.

"You haven't handed anything in to me yet, Miss Biddle," he said gently.

A quizzical expression showed on her face, as though he was giving her some odd bit of news. Then she nodded in agreement, but she said nothing.

"Well, when can I expect to see your work?" he prodded.

"You mean," she asked slowly, "that I'm supposed to write something?"

"That's the general purpose of this class," he said. As he watched her, trying to see through the mask of her withdrawal to the real person within, it suddenly occurred to him that maybe there wasn't any. This manner of hers might cover an incredible stupidity, a vacuity so profound that no one could believe in it, an absolutely interstellar emptiness onto which most observers might project an image of themselves. As on the first day she had come to his class, he was struck by the inexplicable peculiarity of her beautiful head. Now, as then, her hair was held back by a lavender ribbon.

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She wore a lavender cashmere sweater on which he saw a pearl-rimmed sorority pin. She seemed to shrink inside the sleek, furry black coat that she had thrown over her shoulders.

"All right," she said faintly. "I'll write one." With the faint grimace of one who tries to remember something, she turned and left him without another word.

The next morning he found her story on his desk when he came to his office. It was on ten faultlessly typed pages, the pages themselves conveying some of the quality he had sensed in her person—aloofness, a sort of non-presence that left a physical track to dissemble its lack of reality. And the story—the story was wonderfully, or horribly, more of the same. As he began to read it he had no sense of its quality. In terms of language it had none of the awkwardness or straining for effect that he was so familiar with in the attempts of his students.

On the other hand, he had the sense that it might have been written at top speed in this single, perfect draft, with no pauses at all for reflection and no conscious concern except for this awe-inspiring neatness. He was not sure that her story meant anything at all.

"It's not a realistic story," he ventured as an exploratory beginning on the afternoon when he called her in for a conference on the piece.

"No," she said. Her pretty head was inclined over the pages laid on his desk top, and it seemed to him that there was an unusual flush to her skin, as if she were afraid of something—perhaps of being punished for perpetrating a hoax.

"But it's interesting," Corrigan said. "It *seems* interesting, though I have to admit I found it opaque. I read about the old woman and the girl and her doll, and I know that the old woman breaks the girl's doll. But I don't know what this all means, what I'm supposed to understand by these events."

He saw the coral colored tongue touch the girl's lips and she said in a small, thrilling voice, "My theme is the death of beauty." The precise little sentence stung something in Corrigan's mind. His first—defensive—reaction was that such precision was comic, grotesque. He was glad she had

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not declared herself with such patness in front of the class. He could imagine their nervous, intolerant response. But as his mind repeated the silvery tone in which she had spoken, he heard in it an unbearable candor—as if, he thought, a sibyl had spoken directly to him. It was, at some deep level, terrifying to admit that he had heard this.

"Yaaaaas," he said in his encouraging, classroom voice, urging her to go on, to expand her explanation of this theme. But she sat as if she had told him all he needed to know.

He dropped his attention to the baffling pages. As he turned through them he began his own paraphrase, in the hope that his interpretation might unlock the frozen structure of it. "Yaaas, I see. The doll is the symbol of beauty, then. Something that the living little girl holds and loves in her naive, childish belief that because it is beautiful to her it is also eternal—or we might say indestructible. Then when the old woman wantonly takes the doll from her and destroys it, the girl learns that beauty is transitory. That's the main line of the story, isn't it? *Now*, what does this discovery mean to the girl? What does she do with it, for the rest of her life?"

"Nothing."

He laughed at the abruptness of her answer—hearing in his own laughter the braying of insensitivity, but puzzled as to how else he might proceed. "I mean, suppose that in life someone perceives things as this little girl has. Now, as we go on living, this perception somehow gets carried into life. How would it affect her relations with other people? What's the human consequence of this rather abstract perception? Does this girl go on through life making her lyric protest against the death of beauty? Is that her problem? I don't mean you have to write all this down on the pages of your story. I'd like to help you think around it, to see if we can't bring its meaning more out in the open..."

Now Miss Biddle was shaking her head. "The girl doesn't protest. She's glad the doll is broken. Here..." She reached for the manuscript, opened it with precision and put a sharp fingernail on a line near the bottom of the page. "She laughs because the old woman does what she wants and

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breaks the doll. See?"

"Go on," Corrigan encouraged. He had read the line she indicated. It said the little girl laughed—but there was a total omission of motive for the laugh.

"That's all," Miss Biddle said. "She's glad it's broken." She swayed back from his desk and the manuscript into a ramrod stiffness in her chair. Her exquisitely painted lips were open just enough to show the glitter of her teeth. "If it's broken no one else can have it," she said slowly.

Again it seemed to Corrigan that he heard a sibylline finality and inclusiveness in her interpretation—if that was what it could be called. Beyond any psychological interpretation that might be made of either her story or her comprehension of its meaning there seemed to ring a metaphysical knowledge. It was as if she said that beauty might act on men but had no intention of rewarding them, that it did not intend itself for life, but was a mischief there.

She knew that? Slowly, and with a certain fatigued resignation, he assured himself that she *knew* nothing of the kind. Any attempt to question her in the words at his command would only baffle her, he believed, would break like ocean froth against the stone limits of her vocabulary. And yet it seemed to him that the knowledge was with her and he felt something of the ancient terror that might impel a man to lay his hands on an immortal and hold on for the answer that he must have.

He brushed the manuscript aside decisively. "Well, it's *interesting* work," he said in ironic bafflement. "Now there's one other matter I've been a little curious about. Sometimes I've wondered *why* you were in my class. I've had a chance to discuss their intents and aspirations with other members, but you and I have never talked much. Now just what..."

Her eyes blazed fiercely. "*He's* been complaining to you about me. He thinks I'm just here to spy on him. But he needs someone to look out for him. He's got to be careful." There was no doubt in Corrigan's mind that she was talking about her husband, but the emotional outburst was thus far as opaque or inscrutable to him as her manuscript had been.

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"Now, now," he said, trying to placate her. "No one's complained to me. Maybe if you'd explain to me a little more what this is all about, I could..."

"It's none of your business," she said in anguish so unmistakable that he was stung to the heart by it. "It's none of your business." She snatched her manuscript and dashed from the office. She left behind a faint odor of perfume and scented soap. Corrigan heard the sleet rattle on the window of his office. Outside he saw the black trees motionless in the icy downpour and, like a child terrified of its own loneliness, he suffered from the ache of mystery she had left.

V

"She didn't write that, you know," Forest said. "She got scared when you asked her why she hadn't handed in anything and went to the sorority files and found something, copied it, and handed it in." He ended his charge with a low-toned but almost hysterical intensity. Corrigan saw that his hand was trembling.

He had been walking along the street when Forest called to him—from the door of the bar in which he had collapsed that night at the beginning of the Fall. There was something very important that he needed to know, Forest said, inviting him into the bar for a drink. And as soon as they had sat down, he began an impassioned revelation of how his wife had cheated by handing in a story she had not composed herself.

"It was quite an extraordinary piece of work," Corrigan objected. He squinted into the fog of pipesmoke that he was laying between himself and the boy. Since his interview with Miss Biddle he had permitted his imagination to work around the meaningless—or uninterpretable—elements of her story until *he* had made of them a fairly elaborate structure, not so much a work of art as it was the semi-conscious visioning that precedes the concrete task of fashioning a work. It had struck its needling roots into his thought and his thought had nourished it, until now it had become more a story about the sibylline Miss Biddle than a product by her—or by anyone

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else, if he were to credit her husband's information.

He did not want to credit it. The story of the child and doll, the old woman and Miss Biddle, was now, in its growing, his story. "It's an especially unusual piece for her to find in the sorority files. I thought they were more given to storing successful Freshman essays than this sort of thing."

"Maybe they clip literary magazines from other colleges," Forest said. "They're resourceful. They'll do anything. I don't know where they got it, but I know where she got it, because she told me."

"And you're telling me," Corrigan muttered into the cloud of pipe smoke. With his usual moderation of tone he added, "I'd have preferred to find this out—if I found it out—by myself."

Forest nodded sombrely. "So I'm an informer. I don't care. I've got to do things the only way I can. With her it's kill or be killed."

"Oh now," Corrigan cautioned, "It can't be that desperate."

Forest spread his hands in suffering exasperation. "For me it is. If she'd give me a little time, then it might not be. A few years. I know if I'm going to make anything as a writer I've got to concentrate everything on it now. I'm not so strong that I can afford not to." He peered down in dismay at his quivering hand on the table top between them. "I think if I can have as much time as Dostoevsky, and nobody gets in my road, then I'll be as great as Dostoevsky, because I see what he's talking about. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"But she doesn't want to give me any time. It's *now*, *now*, *now* with her. Like her getting in your class and pretending to be a writer. Ha. *That's* why I have to stoop to informing on her."

"Mmmmmm." Corrigan was not, by any means, sure that he understood what he was hearing. Faint hints of a pattern from Forest's rambling seemed to spread sensibly across his mind, but it was such a pattern as only the imagination can credit, and not the sort of pattern which could provide a credibility sufficient for action or even advice.

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"How did you happen to marry this... this virago?" he asked.

"I hashed at her sorority house last year," Forest said toughly. He took a savage gulping drink and then, as his eyes met Corrigan's with beggarly frankness, the left side of his mouth sagged as if it were being pulled down by a hook. "I fell in love with her, with *them*," he said, and then with a sudden resumption of his tough affectations went on, "They're a pretty heady brew for somebody who comes from where I do, and the year before I'd been in Korea. No hero stuff. I was clerking in Pusan. But it was Korea. And then you know the way they *smell* when they come down for breakfast. The perfume or powder or whatever it is smells like the whole upstairs full of them. So you think if you could just get into one of them once it would be the moon. Even if you have to marry her to do it. No. It wasn't like that. I mean it wasn't exactly like that. You could even say I loved her, if you wanted to use a silly word like that. I don't know any more. I really don't know why I did it or why she did it, but I know that now's not the time. I know I wouldn't make it if I wasted myself on her. Do you see? She doesn't want anything except to ruin me."

"We-ell," Corrigan said. A pattern was clearer to him now. But where to locate that pattern? Was it in the boy's mind? A thing of objective reality? Or—and here he sensed the real trick—was it some passionate and useless configuration of his own devising? For what he had realized (there was no other term for the solidity of his conviction) was that he believed morbidly in the girl's capacity and even intent to ruin this apparently healthy and energetic young man, seeing her in his mind's eye not as an object of love but as Love herself, the bearer of perfumed smells from the upper secret rooms of life, the implacable spirit whose purposes are no more benign than those of a dynamo or furnace. He believed in the reality of something fragile in Forest (in spite of appearances) that was indeed vulnerable to Love's hostility. And nothing in the genial surface of his life warranted these beliefs. The conservative surface of his experience warned,

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People are not like this and they have no immediate commerce with the machinations of Divinity. It was something sick in himself, no doubt, that was responsible for the extreme transpositions he made of them. They're a fairly ordinary young couple, he thought, with the fairly ordinary psychological problems of people who marry in college. They'll live through them—one way or other—and come to a time when they hardly show the scars.

"...at me every minute," Forest was saying. "I got a lousy terrible cold and told her I didn't feel like it, but even then she wouldn't leave me alone. But at the same time that wasn't like her either. I knew she wasn't any happier about it than I was. I had to physically walk out with my suitcase..."

Don't tell me this! Corrigan tried to command. Of course it was for the boy's own sake that he wanted him to shut up. But also, and beyond this, his nerves tingled as at the presence of a sacrilege, as if with a primitive suspicion that She was overhearing with a certain malign satisfaction. "Now, now, now, now," he said in a cautionary tone, increasing the density of the smoke cloud in which they profanely saw the mystery. "Now we needn't consider too curiously."

"I don't give a damn about proprieties," Forest said—as if he had not already made that plain, and made plain that a blindness to the real nature of his antagonist was part of the means by which She was destroying him, "Christ, I've talked about it to other people..."

"And they all laughed," Corrigan said, laughing gently, feeling a superstitious shudder threaten his control, threaten to crescendo the laugh louder into an obscene hysteria. "She's a very attractive woman, and it's easy to see you wouldn't get much sympathy as long as she's pursuing you. No."

"They all laughed," Forest said. "Nobody else realizes what a bitch she is. Nobody can tell, like in class when I try to say something she's there hanging on every word I say, so that I always mess it all up and sound *stupid*."

"She delivers you to your enemies," Corrigan mused. And it seemed to him that the other members of the class, who did

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not think of themselves as Forest's enemies, who in general admired him at least for his stubborn, headlong ferocity and probably for the glow of real promise they saw in his work (he the one they would most probably think of as artist)—they were indeed the enemies of the biding, perfect self that Forest meant to stake everything on becoming.

"Perhaps because she loves you," Corrigan went on tentatively.

"I don't ask her for that," Forest said bitterly. "That's the last thing I'd ask her for."

"But more likely because you love her," Corrigan said, feeling with a certain relief that the clichés of verbal communication dampered and controlled the very paradoxes they might create. "You don't want her to see anything but the best. Yaaaas. It may be that I understand. I see it might be better if you weren't both in the same class."

"If she was only willing to *wait*," Forest said. As if the arrow flying at the heart could listen to the merely conscious cry that protests its nature and its flight. "See, I want to be generous with her—or anybody. I don't like what I'm doing. But before I could ever get quite set to give her something, she'd already asked for it and tried to get it."

"Well now, well now," Corrigan said. "I can't do a miracle for you. Alas. But now I wonder if I can't do something to relieve your situation. Let me try."

VI

Because he would not and could not—given what he had glimpsed, being transformed thereby into a less than innocent bystander—expel Miss Biddle from his class for cheating, he chose another method of separating her and her husband. He went rather humbly to Moore Tyburn and asked him to take Forest into the advanced class.

"Why not?" Tyburn asked. His hurtling, insatiable appetite for fodder to hurl into the mill of literature seemed to have brought him past the point of setting standards for admission into his class; to a situation in which he would wel-

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come any new recruits.

"Actually, this boy does pretty well," Corrigan said. "Most of his stuff has been fairly autobiographical, but melodramatic, accounts of his war experience in Korea. He hasn't much sense of organization, but if you'll read these things of his I've brought, I think you'll find a certain power."

"I don't need to read them," Tyburn said. "If you found merit in them, that's good enough for me. I'll be glad to get him. Sure, send him to my class. Do you want to handle the red tape of transferring him or shall I?"

Corrigan said, "There's possibly just one thing I ought to tell you and that is you'll find Forest... fragile. No, that's not the word, but he's more advanced in his opinion of himself than his work will show. *He*'s out ahead of his obvious limitations. He's the 'artist as a young man'," he concluded awkwardly.

And admitting the awkwardness of his statement he could not exactly blame Tyburn for laughing in response, "Oh. *That* bullshit. I've pretty well got my people over that so they look at the *work*. I've beat them over the head that they're all mid-Western bourgeois anyway, who've been laved by the horn of plenty since the War, so there's no bloody use in them going around like the *poètes maudits* or sobbing about themselves as if they came out of the *Thirties*."

Corrigan waved a big, soft, freckled hand as if to erase an error written on a blackboard and said, "I don't mean that Forest is full of self pity. It's hard to state, but he sees himself as ... well, as he said to me, as an incomplete Dostoevsky." He put one sausage-sized finger at one end of Tyburn's desk and one at the extreme opposite end and said, "*Here*'s what he actually is and *here*'s what he *knows* he is."

Tyburn nodded in smiling complicity, closing his eyes. One staff man to another. "I already have one of those," he said. "I beat that bullshit out of him and now he's doing some pretty fair things. They're not publishable, but they're *solid*."

"Well," Corrigan said. "Maybe you can beat it out of Forest. There's another thing. He's having a lot of trouble

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with his wife, and..."

"Who hasn't had?" Tyburn said gaily. "Anguish and agony. We all get it. There'd be nothing to write about if we didn't. Good," he said, like a colonel accepting a junior officer from another colonel, "I'll be glad to get your boy. Look Corrigan, I was going to call you anyway. You know Randolph Markwell is coming here Tuesday. We're going to have a few drinks with him and eat at the hotel before he goes up to Old Main for his lecture. I wondered if you'd go with me to his train to meet him. And I *also* wondered if you'd introduce him instead of me. Franklin thought I should introduce him, but I have the strong feeling that since we made him at the Review, it would be fresher all the way around if you or someone else from the outside sort of summed up his work for the audience."

The direct consequence of Corrigan's meddling was that Forest's wife quit his class. She came to him in a quite unexpected burst of passion. Her translucent ears glowed like pink neon from their suffusion of blood. (Was it from the cold which by then had gripped the campus in a pre-Christmas chill, he wondered when she came into his office? It was not. It was from sheer female rage.)

"I know all about it," she said in a shrill, simple voice. "I know you listened to him and believed everything he said to you about me."

"Now, now," Corrigan said in a fumbling, pipe-stoking embarrassment. "You surely don't think I'd listen to any confidences that were too personal in nature. Or that he would divulge so much of your personal affairs as you seem to think." As he spoke he remembered Forest's telling him how she would not leave him alone when even he had a bad cold—and her ice-absolute blue eyes seemed to be reading now the exact content of Forest's confidences to him. "It's true that he wanted to get into the advanced class. I felt it justified—oh, for a number of reasons. I have great hopes for your husband, Mrs. Forest."

"Don't you think he told me how he'd tricked you?" she

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said. "He's a lot more neurotic than you think. He's told me that you fell for a big old sob story he gave you."

"Neurotic? Apparently so," Corrigan said drily. "You'll—both of you will—have to forgive me for not keeping your pace. I've never quite encountered a similar situation before. I wasn't aware that you and he were still in such close communication. Evidently I misjudged."

"Oh, he comes around to tell me when he thinks he's put something over on me," she said. Then in the exhaustion of her anger she said with a grave mellowness that in its common-place might have been that of any common girl, "I only try to do what I can to take care of him. I don't want him to hurt himself. He *is* a strange one. I knew that and mother and daddy knew it and everyone at the sorority knew it. But everyone wanted to help him. If he could just accept anything. If he could just accept for me to be with him. At least I could keep him from killing himself. He's not such a genius as he thinks he is. But you encourage him."

"Do I?" Corrigan asked. Then with half-closed eyes and smiling he said, "I don't know that I do anything at all. You two seem to be using me for purposes I don't understand. I feel like the hall carpet. I sense a great deal of running back and forth over me."

Finally, more in sorrow than in anger, she announced that she would not be coming back to his class. Tacitly they both agreed there would be no point in her continuing now.

VII

The visit of the poet Randolph Markwell went off rather successfully, Corrigan thought, with nothing to mar it at all except for Forest's insulting him. And that... well, he hoped that Markwell would not hold the incident as a grudge; and he shrewdly suspected that Markwell had been insulted before, rather welcomed insults.

To begin with, the visit brought the welcome necessity for Corrigan to read the three volumes of Markwell's poetry, where he found, as he was prepared to do, an excellence and

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a power that moved him greatly. One night as he read late in his study at home, he let Markwell's book fall from his hands as he smilingly remembered the night at Franklin's when Tyburn had spoken of going to spit on Master's grave. Yes, Corrigan thought, what these young fellows of Tyburn's and Markwell's generation had done justified whatever fury they might feel toward their predecessors... almost justified... "Drive your plow and your cart over the bones of the dead," he thought. *They* had obeyed Blake's injunction in these last twenty-five years, and if they had ridden over many things that had been precious to him (even Whitman, he thought, they had ground into the earth to get their foothold) here, as in this book he had been reading, was the warranty for their ruthlessness. It *was* better than the poetry produced by Masters' generation; at least it was alive now with that keening thrum of work that has matched its hour, while the things of Sandburg, Masters, Robinson, Lindsay, Jeffers—even Frost—were still alive in another sense altogether, like memories of joy or honor.

He had been reading Markwell's long poem on Orpheus and Eurydice, marveling at the rich progression of the structure—the first section in which themes, rhythms, allusive names, hieratic words were strewn down with a *profligacy approaching disorder, to be caught up again*, expanded, connected with each other, inflected by their new place in the constellation of images, brought to an ironic halt, destroyed, and then resurrected in a final choral harmony in which each held its properly subordinated place so that what was partly a narrative of the search through hell for the loved one moved not merely in a narrative line but on a broad, devastating front. There was something of Rilke's treatment of the myth in Markwell's poem—none of the good young ones were ashamed of confiscating what they needed since Eliot—but there was in the poem as a whole still that honk and gibber of an emotion that exceeded the form (what I might call the "barbaric yawp", Corrigan thought, only I mustn't say in introducing him that he's got anything from Whitman, though I suppose it would be

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well taken if I mentioned Melville). The hell where Eurydice was sought was real and no less mythic for being the contemporary scene and culture, Eurydice no less fabulous for being—as the literary gossips were well aware—the poet's first wife, now in an asylum in Massachusetts.

The poem lit up so many darknesses, Corrigan thought, half-drowsing in his chair. It was in the poem's ambience, after all, that he had seen the propriety of hatred between a generation of poets and its predecessors, a rigid necessity that was not without its beauty. And then—perhaps more important, perhaps less—there was a kind of morality in the very structuring of the anguish and separation that were the subject matter of the poem. If it did not, by its argument, justify God's ways to man, it did justify the belief that art was not helpless before the sweep of time. It was strange how that knowledge satisfied a need primitive as hunger. But all over again he had discovered that it was so.

Of itself, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice was unbearable. Not only the loss of the wife, but the mocking condition of the God—the *Thou shalt not look back* which demanded a faith that uncertain humanity could not bear, in the nature of things unbearable. But the bargain was otherwise with art added. The loss was irreparable, but the looking back was not a hopeless glance into the void. Out of memory a song could be made, and the celebration of what had been defied the mockery of gods or things. She *was*, the poet said. I *loved*. And loss was not the void.

Why, I've moralized Mr. Markwell's very modern poem, Corrigan thought slyly, and I don't think he'd like if it he caught me pinning a tail on it like this.

But in the comfort of his study and his solitude, he did not care too much what Markwell's response might be. The poem was his tonight and he could dandle it on his knee and spoil it like a sentimental grandfather if he chose.

He looked out through the wide windows to where the moon was shining on thick snow. He knew well enough that that denying whiteness was hell and he knew with a sort of total clarity how sick with love he had been for his

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wife and others who were lost in it. He could look at it squarely now and know it for what it was. I can look at it go without howling, he thought, because I can look back and know that if we go, we have been.

"From briefest meetings something sure is won," he thought. But that wasn't Mr. Markwell's contribution, he reminded himself, and perhaps was not even in the spirit of Markwell's statement. It would be ingratitude to Markwell to embellish his wonderfully sufficient text with such private associations.

Carefully withholding the private reflections that had come from reading Markwell, he shaped his other thoughts of that night into an introduction for Markwell's lecture in the Old Main auditorium. To which Markwell responded, as soon as he rose to speak, by saying goodness, he hadn't known there was *all that* in his l'il old, old poem about Orpheus and Eurydice—a tongue-in-cheek disclaimer which satisfied the entire, diverse audience of librarians, English faculty, graduate English students, writing students, and a scattering of out-of-towners who had driven in through a growing blizzard to get the Markwell word. It produced a yak, and, as a lecturer, Markwell was in business for yaks. His enthusiastic approach to modern poetry was of the golly, gee-whiz, lookee-how-old-Eliot-juggles-so-many-balls-at-the-same-time school. He was not going to be caught *solemn* by any quick throw rifled down the third base line, he let it be known.

His talk was unflaggingly entertaining, Corrigan thought, and foolish. To which he had no objection at all. It seemed to him that anyone who had *written* Orpheus and Eurydice had every right to masquerade in public as a clown and a trifler. There was no safe audience for a poet to meet face to face. And yet he felt a qualm lest some of those he saw down there in the audience should think the stream of sparkling inanities from Markwell was the business of a poet. Loafing in his chair beside Markwell and screened from the room's attention by his pyrotechnics, Corrigan could watch the

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faces of most of his students lifted in the bright hypnotism of belief that the end of their efforts was to be, somewhere and sometime, as entertaining as Markwell was tonight. Of course, he supposed, it was part of the departments' purpose in bringing "name writers" here to the campus to foster the illusion that a writer's career might come approximately to the same kind of success as that available to an actor or an automobile salesman. Given the hostile pressures of the world they would have to find their lives in, it was, perhaps, an illusion they deserved.

He saw Elaine Biddle in one of the front rows. She was watching Markwell's every move with a coldly carnivorous stare as if she meant to find, then and there, the secret of his success and appropriate it. At least so it seemed to Corrigan, sensing her ruthlessness, though he could hardly have said why she might want the secret. Surely not for her own use, unless she meant to make a career out of plagiarizing manners as well as manuscripts—a pointless fancy, of course.

He was still wondering about her motives for venturing out on such a cold night when he saw her later at the reception for Markwell that Tyburn had arranged to follow the lecture. "I'm not asking any of the old goats like Peltus and Franklin," Tyburn had confided to him, marking him sheep with the same opportunistic recklessness that had marked him goat on another occasion. "I plan to lay in a little booze and give the writers on the campus—maybe some of the younger people from the art department—some kind of a chance to take down their hair with Mark. He'll like that." For this proposed intimacy, Tyburn had rented a private dining room above one of the town restaurants.

The room was filled, an hour after the lecture, with the happily drinking young sheep from the writing classes and faculty. A bar had been improvised at one side of the room. Opposite it, on a couch that seemed to date from pioneer days, Markwell continued to play for them all his role of Poet as Success. Corrigan made no immediate effort to join the group around him, but paused on its outskirts long

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enough to hear that the topic was basketball and the University's prospects during the current season. He saw that Elaine Biddle had found a place beside Markwell on the couch and was watching his face with that unwavering intentness that a careless man might mistake for an interest in what he was saying.

At the bar Forest was haranguing Kelsey and Jost. He had not taken off his green GI coat. His face was red and sweating and he was drinking very fast. "No," he was saying as Corrigan came up to them, "no, that's not my point at all. I'm not saying Markwell is no good. I haven't read his stuff so how could I say that?"

"If you haven't read his work...," Jost said, shrugging and laughing.

"I have read *some* of it," Forest insisted. "Not bad. He's got some good lines. What I'm talking about, for Christ's sake, is why he's doing the kind of thing he's doing and how he's got where he is. I mean, what's the good of writing that kind of thing any more? So he does it very well. So he's learned how to do it very well and he knows all the tricks, and how to make it sound like it said something on three levels, and so maybe the quince is the emblem of love and happiness to the Ancients *and* the symbol of European civilization. What difference does all that make? Who cares? Do you care?"

The rhetoric was addressed to Jost, who, more nimble socially than Forest, ducked it by stepping back to acknowledge Corrigan's arrival, and at the same time passing the question to him as if it were a plate of goodies. Noting that Corrigan must have overheard the substance of Forest's question, he asked laughing, "Do *you* care, Professor Corrigan?"

With Forest watching him from furious eyes (though he was laughing too) Corrigan considered the question with hmms and ahhhs until they had put a drink in his hand. Then he said, "Do I care about the symbols of European civilization? I hope I do."

The young men, Forest included, took his answer as a joke and respectfully ignored its feebleness.

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"I don't care about them," Forest said. "I don't feel anything for them at all. They're a lot of junk jewelry as far as I'm concerned. One thing I have read of Markwell's is this long-winded, pretentious business about Orpheus and Eurydice. No doubt it's a pretty story, but it's not important to us."

"Important as what?" Corrigan asked.

Forest seemed annoyed by the pedagogic demand for an illustration. "Well, as the things Dostoevsky wrote about, for example. Or the things that Lawrence wrote about. You see what I mean." His tone added the impatient postcript... "if you seriously want to and aren't just wasting our time."

Corrigan said, "A colleague of mine consistently finds Shakespeare superior to all modern poets. Maybe that's not all there is to be said, though."

"I mean there isn't any point in second-rate work," Forest said. "Anything that there's something of it better than just clutters up..."

"'Something of it better than...'" Jost giggled. But Forest was certainly above any mere sniping at his syntax. He was plainly in the grip of his vision, which happened, as it had with more than a few from the literary pantheon, to be a vision in which he did not distinguish between himself and greatness, between the plant that does not grow on mortal soil and the imperious need for recognition he felt within himself. At this point he plunged on to another incoherent fragment from his reflections. "You read about Van Gogh at the time he and some of the others, Impressionists, had a show of their paintings, and you can see Van Gogh standing in front of his, waiting for people to come and look at it. How embarrassing he'd be to everyone else who'd kind of stand back and say 'My little daub doesn't amount to anything,' when he knew his did and no one else could see it." It was shockingly clear—to Corrigan at least—that Forest was talking about himself, that he saw himself here, among this crowd of dilettantes and poseurs as the lonely and furious Van Gogh. In a word, it was clear that he was not unconscious of playing a role, though probably unable to keep

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an orderly distinction between himself and his Van Gogh role.

And would it not be, Corrigan wondered, an impertinence to ask, Where is your work? Van Gogh, Rimbaud, Joyce, or any other of the furious egoists must indeed have seemed as intolerably vain as Forest now, but couldn't Forest realize that everyone else looked at that vanity through the justifying frame of hallowed works, while only he presumed to look at it nakedly and share it with no visible sign of justification? To feel oneself not only an artist but a great artist was a recklessness that approached insanity—and he could believe that was exactly what Forest felt of himself. He did not want to deny what Forest felt, but by his whole temperament and from the mellowing that age had given him, he wanted to interpose a *maybe* between Forest's reckless *I am* and the certain denial he would encounter if he exposed himself too far.

"I have the weakness of liking all art," he said, seriously wishing to take up Forest's argument. "For me the libraries and museums aren't big enough. I like whatever is done in the right spirit, and I don't always know how to put it in ranks—first, second, and so on." It seemed to him at that transient moment he knew what it was he had to teach Forest, if there were time and opportunity for that—the way to accept a scaling down between the vision and the accomplishment. He knew what it meant and the boy needed to know, and there was the true valence of pedagogy. But as they were met here, he could not even find a way of assuring Forest that he was not hostile to his precious arrogance. While he was composing a way to lure on Forest's argument, Forest's wife slipped in between them and took her husband's arm.

"Come on over and talk to *him*," she said to Forest. "He said to bring you over."

"Go on," Corrigan urged. "It's not every day you have the opportunity." He was lightly disappointed by her intrusion at that moment, but ironically pleased, too, that she should be demonstrating her usefulness as a wife. So now he

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knew why she had braved the blizzard to come out tonight. The little pirate wanted Markwell for her husband—not his scalp or his money, but the Success himself, softened up and in a mood to talk to Forest as an equal. She knew, he thought, what kind of gifts were likely to touch this strange husband of hers, and if she could not offer him her physical charms directly, at least she knew how to use them in barter for something he did want.

He had fallen into a banal, edgeless talk with Jost when he heard the shouting from the couch. It was Markwell's voice.

"Everyone's a writer," he was shouting bitterly. "Paper's cheap, so you're a writer too." It was Forest at whom he was shouting, Forest planted on a chair in front of him, staring at the poet with the knowing smile of an inquisitor who has just exposed a phony. "Jesus Christ," Markwell shouted, "I know your type. The Village is full of them. Find them in every college, little sonofabitching pipsqueaks who have to bolster their ego by attacking someone. How I pity you. I didn't come here to be attacked. I thought I was among friends." He swung, as if desperately, toward Forest's wife, and, seeing in her eyes the sympathy of a mother cobra, twisted toward Tyburn as if Tyburn could exorcise this nightmare figure which had appeared to disturb his peace. "I'm leaving, Moore, I'm going back to my hotel. When's the first plane out of this goddamn hick town? All I asked for was a reasonable amount of manners. Did I ask for anything more?" he demanded of the hushed group gathered around him.

"Take it easy, Mark," Tyburn advised. "Get him another drink, you. I don't know where this one crept in from," he told Markwell, pointing his elbow at Forest.

Then the voice of Forest's wife, piercing and memorable as the shriek of a seabird, cut its ice edge through the racket. "Well, it was stupid," she said. "Everything you said all evening was stupid. Did you think you were talking to a kindergarten?" she said to Markwell. She dragged at Forest's shoulder. "Come on Steve," she said, "let's go out of here."

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As if he were so intoxicated, or rapt in the continuation of the dialogue that Markwell had cut off, Forest, still smiling his fixed, catatonic smile, let her lead him from the room.

"My God," Corrigan said to Tyburn a while later. "What happened over there?" He held one hand over his eyes as if it were his own embarrassment he was hiding. "What brought on the fuss?"

"This kid attacked him," Tyburn said. "Mark was just talking about the Dodgers—perfectly innocent—and what's-his-name butted in and asked, 'Who do you think you're talking to?' and Mark ignored that. But he butted in again with something about Mark sounding more like a traveling salesman than a poet. Wow. Where do you dig up characters like that? It was unbelievable. It was like some silly thing out of Dostoevsky. And then that girl with him, who'd been making big eyes at Mark, turned on him too. Christ, I don't want this to get back to New York. Now, I'm going to have to get Mark good and drunk."

As he filled Markwell's glass again with shaking hands he demanded of Corrigan, "That's the boy you peddled to me, isn't it?" With a semi-tolerant laugh he accused, "You didn't tell me he was crazy."

"Ah, well now," Corrigan comforted, "the boy's just awkward. I don't suppose he meant to offend anyone."

"These bleeding little egoes," Tyburn said. "'Exterminate the brutes.'" There was a momentary flash of puzzlement across his face, a frightened wonder, as if some perversion of the optic nerves had given him a short glimpse of a chimera. But then he said, "*Otherwise* it's not a bad party. Mark's seen students before. He'll just have to lump it. But the kid must be a clinical case."

Corrigan bowed his head to this judgment.

VIII

It must have been that night when he caught the bug. When he left the party not long after Forest's bombshell, the snow was falling with soundless emphasis, as if it meant

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to finish things off here and now. It was falling on top of other snow and already had hidden the hubs of cars parked along the street. Under the streetlights and the shoplights it glittered with a fluffy, malign purity and its delicate texture muffled the sound of the few cars still passing on the street.

The air was not cold. After the wind that had blown all day had died, there was a sort of neutrality in the temperature. Corrigan was sweating under his overcoat as he came into the district where no tracks broke the snow along the sidewalk. He had to wade with high prancing steps for the last few blocks before he came to his apartment building. He was panting when he came onto the steps, which the janitor had shoveled clear.

Then, as he stood there looking back on the formless white drifting that was already filling in even his own tracks, it occurred to him that he did not want go to in. Some rollicking impulse to go flounder in the white inundation held him a while, staring back. Childish, he thought. Then he thought, Children hear it, the siren appeal of the snow that dissolves away the familiar forms and outlines of things so they know the intimate attraction of nothingness. Like a memory older than any memory of love he knew how falling snow and the night posed the question, "Do you care?" and what drunken delight it was for the child to answer No. Nothing in life was quite so keen as that pre-sexual thrill of abandonment back to nothingness, the white center.

Now again he heard the tempter's voice, and he thought, No one would know what lasciviousness it would be to yield. And then, as if he needed besides a conventional reason for staying out, he thought, I won't go far, and it is beautiful. To watch it a while longer can't hurt. But the legs of his trousers were damp above the tops of the four-buckle overshoes his wife had bought him. All right, not tonight, he thought sadly, and went in to the comfort of his apartment and the precaution of his cold pills.

Nevertheless, in spite of caution, he had caught the bug. His first sign of it was an extremely nasty and literary waking

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dream of Forest's wife, in which she took the double role of child and old woman. It was nasty in its gross sexuality, and it was literary in its fantastic resemblance to the hunting days in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," when the green knight's wife comes to Sir Gawain's bed. She had been to his bed in a wintry castle and he had accepted her—if that was the word for the ugly connections they had made—both as pre-pubescent child and dripping grandmother.

He woke with a heavy sense of self-repugnance, found that his eyes and all his muscles ached, as if from immense effort, and that his throat was painfully sore. Some strain of ancient Calvinism made him glad of the pain, as if it were a specific and merited punishment for having dreamed as he had—though at the same time, at a remoter level of awareness, he understood that the dream was the graver pain. He gargled and tried to stretch his muscles with some bending exercises that he had mostly given up years before, and finally he got himself in shape to go to his office long enough for conferences with Miss Emery and a doctoral candidate preparing a thesis on Chaucer.

By afternoon he had to admit that he needed medical attention. He took a cab to the dispensary at the University Hospital and there, after an examination, the doctor ordered him into the hospital "for a few days."

"Bronchial pneumonia," the doctor said. "I don't think it's going to be serious, but we want to keep an eye on you."

"Sounds like protective custody. Sounds as if the police were taking me in," Corrigan said, his little pleasantry reflecting a deep-lying guilty sense that it was not for his illness that he was being taken in but for the wicked, improper dream that had accompanied it.

"Yes, protective custody," the doctor agreed absently, already occupying himself with the formalities of ordering Corrigan's admission. "I'm not expecting anything serious to happen. But we have to think of your age."

The pain was still slight, and that afternoon began like a holiday for Corrigan. Lightly intoxicated with the fever he submitted contentedly to the attentions of the orderlies

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helping him into bed. The neutral whiteness of the bed into which he climbed appealed to him as a civilized and comfortable substitute for the snow which had called him the night before. To sink into it was a yielding but not an ultimate yielding. *A bed for dreams*, he thought feverishly as he crawled in and pulled the sheets up to his chin.

He felt fine, he felt wonderful, as soon as he was in bed. He was not really sick at all. He had—he admitted this somewhat shamefully—needed a refuge in which he could think out his dream, or the dream of his life, more than he needed medical attention. As soon as the nurse had finished the formalities of taking his temperature and pulse and giving him penicillin, he let himself slide indulgently back to a consideration of his morning's dream—as if *here* it was permitted, while at home among the vestiges of the life he had shared with a good woman it was not. It was as if the sterility of the hospital was intended to accomodate not merely his septic body but the septic mental accompaniment. The environment freed him from responsibility for what he might think as well as for the poisonous fluxes that came from his body.

It was as if here he was going to be given time and a kind of warrant for digging back through the unconscious panorama of the dream to the conscious preparation for it. (Going one step beyond Freud to complete the circle, he thought with outlandish glee.) For he could see how this morning's dream of Forest's wife had come from the seed of his perfectly conscious interpretation of her story. And if it were to be objected that this story was not hers because she had not written it, he could understand clearly now how she had made it hers by choice just as he had chosen a literary form in which to dream about her.

As he lay there looking out from his white room onto the white campus and the white hills beyond the edge of town, it seemed to him that he could see through arch beyond arch and see, almost diagrammatically, how the process of imagination worked. And it seemed to him with an exuberance he had not felt since he was a young man, that he

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was about to begin a tremendous imaginative work. Little Miss Biddle had stolen a story, and that was a crude illustration of how the process worked. But he... well, he was going to steal Miss Biddle and her story, and the story of her stealing the story, and the story of his stealing, and... Contentedly he fell asleep.

Within a few days he saw how he had been tricked into this euphoria by his fever. *Something* strange was happening in his mental life, but it was not the beginning of a new phase of creativity. All over again he had to admit what he had long ago humbly concluded—that his ability to write had been long since exhausted. The lifelong accumulation of experience and insight from reading had been somehow tipped loose and was avalanching *as if* toward some point of concentration where it might be transformed into a work of his own. But it never quite arrived. Instead it seemed to exhaust itself in the fireworks of literary dreams about Forest's wife and—sometimes—Forest. He had tried imaginatively (using the same heavily equipped critical probes that he might have brought to a poem) to pierce their lives. And in some fashion he had gone too far. He no longer had any defense against them. Whenever he slept he would find himself dreaming about them in some literary situation or another. They were everyone, from Popeye and Temple Drake to Dante and Beatrice, Gatsby and Daisy, Heathcliff and Cathie, Paul Morel and Miriam, Raskolnikoff and Sonia, Paolo and Francesca, Maggie and Jiggs. Sometimes he was involved in their relationship carnally, sometimes spiritually, but after a time these dreams became his chief source of discomfort. Then they began to frighten him as he recognized them not as promises of new insights but as signs of dissolution.

After a few days he complained of them petulantly to the doctor. "They're embarrassing," he said.

The doctor listened but was not greatly impressed. "They'll go away when we get your fever down. You're clear enough when you're awake, aren't you?"

Yes, Corrigan admitted, he was, but wakefulness had become increasingly boring. Now his days seemed to pass

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in an uneasy suspension between the boring winter whiteness that his consciousness perceived and the unholy medley of his undiscliplined dreams.

It was as if he had recklessly abandoned that familiar vantage point from which he could turn safely toward either reason or fantasy. He felt a great fragility in himself and a bitter impatience with it.

The upshot of it was that he stayed in the hospital longer than his doctor had anticipated. As the doctor had promised, the disease had taken no serious turn, but his convalescence was slow. After the fever had ended, his horrid literary dreams disappeared, and that was a testimony to the doctor's acumen, but Corrigan believed they were still going on inside him, more and more identified with the secret processes of dissolution that his bout of disease had accentuated. It was a humiliation that his last spark of creativity had turned to ashes so quickly.

The Christmas vacation passed while he was still in the hospital and he remained as the first semester drew to an end. It was late in January when, one day, Tyburn came to call on him, bringing a bottle of whiskey and an issue of *Botteghe Oscure* in which some of Tyburn's poems had been published.

At first Corrigan thought irritably that the younger man had come simply because it was that time of year when promotions and salaries for the following year were about to be decided, and that Tyburn might be simply angling for his support and a good word to the head of the department. And that support wasn't needed. This was Tyburn's time. He was on top. He could ride. His generation had secured their reputations, and the head of the department could count up the number of publications credited to Tyburn without any help from Corrigan. (The departmental secretary kept a chart of publications by members of the staff, a chart which had always reminded Corrigan of the stack of an aircraft carrier with its painted emblems of the kills to be credited to each pilot). Tyburn would rise.

But evidently Tyburn knew that too and something else

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was bothering him. In the little time since last fall he had passed from worrying about his security on the staff to a deeper concern. When he had drunk a couple of drinks from his present to Corrigan, he slapped the *Botteghe Oscure* against the bedside table and cried, "The poems I've got in here are *wonderful*. But as soon as I read them I tore up everything I've written since last fall. I've got my ladder."

"That can happen," Corrigan said drily.

"You've been through it," Tyburn said. "You should have a perspective on it. You were doing wonderful stuff before you settled down to teaching. So tell me, is it worth it?"

"I don't know."

"I've got to decide. It's not going to hurt me to stay here another year and Franklin knows the people at the Guggenheim Foundation, so there's a good reason for staying here next year at least. But I've got to make up my mind. I've got to decide whether what I can do for my students is more valuable than what I can do myself."

"Well?"

"I don't know," Tyburn said sombrely. "I can't get the score. Look, that kid you sent to my class. The nutty one. Forest. You were there the night he took off on Markwell. All right. It was a thing that happened and I made up my mind that it wasn't a capital offense. So, I called in Forest and had a long talk with him and thought we had everything straightened out, really. It seems there was more to it than met the eye. Markwell had been pinching his wife, this girl Markwell had been pinching was his wife, and *that* is what riled him up to call Mark down. Which makes *sense*. Those things happen, and I've seen Mark in trouble before, but I didn't know it at the time. So Forest and I had this good talk and I thought we were seeing eye to eye. Then about a week ago Forest gave me part of a novel he's been working on." He paused and shook his head ponderously and poured himself another drink.

"Did it show merit?" Corrigan asked.

"*None*," Tyburn said briskly. "Or I shouldn't say none, but it wasn't good."

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Corrigan nodded slowly. "I'm afraid that Forest, after all, is a mute, inglorious Dostoevsky. The fascinating question is whether or not that is a contradiction in terms. If mute, then Dostoevsky?"

"He *thought* he'd put so much into it," Tyburn said. "He thought it was the history of anguish he's had with this nympho wife of his and there are some moving touches—uh, moving—when he describes how she made insatiable demands on him while he was suffering from the common cold and a big dream sequence where he has her raped by a gang of hoodlums in Chicago, but it's pornography at best."

"Oh my," Corrigan said, clicking his tongue.

"But when I tried to tell him this..."

"You didn't," Corrigan gasped. He could feel the spasmic twisting in his stomach now, fierce and undeniable and hot and passionate as belief itself. "You didn't tell him *that*?"

"What's the point in criticism if it isn't honest?" Tyburn said. "So I told him. So..."

Through the muffled, bombing bursts of his breath, Corrigan gasped, "He swung on you." He saw Tyburn's eyes round out in solemn saucers as he nodded.

"Thank God I didn't lose my head," Tyburn said. "I ran down to the departmental office and the secretary and I held the door on him while Portus called the campus police to come and take him away."

"Hooooo-ooooo," Corrigan shouted, the breath exploding now from his cramped lungs, "Hoooo-oooooo, hah." Like a leaping trout he flung himself up, scattering bedclothes wildly as he turned in mid-air. When he landed, with his face half-buried in the pillow, he was sobbing with helpless laughter.

"Tell me again," he gasped. "How you-ooo-ooo held the door on him."

Happily—it might have gone otherwise—Tyburn began to laugh too. When he could control himself Corrigan sat up and grasped the whiskey bottle by the neck. Between fiery gulps he said, "Don't talk any more about leaving, Tyburn. Where else would you find it like this? Where else

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on earth?"

"It is pretty funny," Tyburn said.

When they had finished the bottle between them, Corrigan was shouting for the nurse, demanding his clothes, swearing that he was going home.

IX

He thought after this that the Forests were through with him. Just as the embarrassing dreams vanished—or went underground—after the fever, they moved in the course of time beyond his purview. When the second semester began, he learned from gossiping with some members of his class that Forest had not registered. He had left the campus, and Corrigan's informants did not know where he had gone. And his wife? Oh, still around, still living at the sorority house where she had been all winter.

Corrigan saw her one evening when an unseasonable warmth had turned early March for a few days into May. He had taken a long walk in the afternoon and was coming home feeling hungry and fit. He had entered Fraternity Row a few blocks above the campus. The imitations thrice-removed of English country houses spread a theatrical setting down the street ahead of him, and into this setting, like a swan boat, came the largest and most chrome-laden convertible he had ever seen. Softly, swishingly, ponderously it glided to the curb a few dozen yards ahead of him and stopped. From a door wide and massy as a church portal, Elaine Biddle Forest descended. She was in a white evening dress and on her shoulders was mink.

At the instant of her descent a gold bar of sunlight flashed through the thicket of elms and fraternity plantings across the street to illuminate her almost to incandescence. As if she had been expecting it, she paused momentarily in the light and with mannequin grace, mannequin blankness wheeled slowly for all the world (or all the universe, Corrigan thought breathlessly) to see.

Then her equerry—tall, broad-shouldered, short of hair and clean of feature, dinner-jacketed and most evidently

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odorless as the stratosphere—leaped out behind her and with an athletic step led her up the front steps and into the fraternity.

That tableau was staged to mean something, Corrigan thought. No part of it was accidental—but where in the universe of accident was the origin of this theatrical purpose, and whose exactly was the discrimination that chose the details of costuming and light and arranged the tempo of this visionary scene, so that fleeting as it was it should continue to vibrate like the persisting hum of a tuning fork? Mine, he thought with ironic arrogance. It was my little eye that saw it all. But whose eye was his? The wind blew acidly from the Northwest as if to remind him that the false-spring blandness of the afternoon past was, even, an illusion of powers who need not recognize his claims as a stock-holder.

As the tuning fork hum of beauty died out and he walked on toward his dinner he fell into a depression, as if it should be an automatic hangover from the exultation he had felt in the instant of seeing her. The depression moved through phases as distinct as spectrum bands as his thought moved on. He felt a kind of groaning compassion for Forest that he had lost this girl, that he had let her beauty go by default into the hands of—of that Philistine, that embryonic hotel manager or corporation lawyer. It was one up again for the enemy. In this vein of thought the convertible, which had seemed a swan-boat to his eye, became a vulgar bit of ostentation, a commercial virility symbol by whose authority (*in hoc signo*) the collectivized male should ravish away the Queen of Love herself. Not that Elaine Biddle was, in this discounting phase, worth likening to the Queen of Love in any way, shape or form. He had it from Tyburn's instructed epithet as well as hints that Forest had given him that the girl was a "nympho." Probably very little ravishing was required. But at the basest level she was valuable poetic property and recruit writers should learn to cling to their beautiful women, just as recruit soldiers should learn to hang onto their weapons.

Now in the violet gloom of his depression he realized with

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a nauseated shock that it was not exactly for Forest's sake that he regretted the loss of Elaine Biddle to the others. Remembering those desperate dreams he had had of her while he was sick he admitted with savage frankness that *he* in his decrepitude was the desolated lover. It was his abandonment and jealousy he lamented now that she had been carried away by that gloomy chariot. He thought, raging, If I had it to do over again, all my life, I'm damned if I'd be a poet. I'd have her. Like a sign of the imminence of his death he felt a swift resentment of his dead wife—that good, warm, encouraging, wise, and loving companion, whose very goodness had tricked him away from the absolute abandonment to his single need which had been—he saw it now—required of him. Insanely he hated her.

And then, of course, he trammeled out the insane revelation with countervailing admonitions to himself. He had had a fit and was over it again, luckily, and able as he had mostly been to see things in proportion. He would go on to the end as himself—a limited man trying to make at least the holy counterfeit of salvation out of those very limitations, and with his mouth he would not willingly nor overtly deny the woman who had been so faithful and precious to him. But in his heart, in its despicable slime and fear...

To the end now, he supposed, that heart would be telling him that he did not care about the past with its measured successes and its limited failures. It was only the monstrous and chimerical future that he loved, the future in which he had so little stake, the true hell from which no singer could bring back the body of love.

She came to him within three days after this, arriving at his office so demurely and so dully earnest that he would not identify her with the girl he had seen getting out of the convertible.

She had brought a package for him. She wanted him to read the manuscript of her husband's novel.

"Well, but if he'd wanted me to read it..." Corrigan began protestingly. "Mr. Tyburn's already read it, I think,

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and discussed it with your husband."

"Read it," she pleaded. "I want to know for sure if it's any good or not." Her pale eyes looked more guileless than she could possibly be. She had laid the swollen bundle of manuscripts between them on the desk and while he had not yet picked it up his wariness conceived it as a bait that he still had the chance of refusing.

"Why?"

"Because as far as he's concerned he's thrown it away," she said. "He wouldn't even take it with him when he left. He would have burned it if I'd let him."

"I heard he was gone. Where?"

With a frown and small shrug of repugnance she said, "Back to New York. His brother-in-law edits comic books. He's going to work for him, writing stories or dialogue or something like that. It seems too bad."

"Too bad."

"He had such high ideals."

"Too bad," Corrigan said. "But this isn't the end of his life. I have the hunch we're going to hear a good deal from that young man before it's through."

She, with that air of not seeming to hear anything she did not want to—rather, of testing with her need whatever was said to her and accepting into the realm of her concern only the useful—said, "I want him to come back here. I want him to finish this book."

"Why? A good many times it's wiser to put aside something that's badly begun and make a fresh start. Not everything we try will work for us. I think you want me to advise him—encourage him—to go on with this, and I suspect Mr. Tyburn may have discouraged him rather sharply. But isn't it likely that I might have the same reservations about it that Mr. Tyburn had?"

She did not hear him. She merely waited for him to admit the folly of his evasiveness.

"Why?" he asked again, and because she did not answer he answered the question himself with a sigh of resignation. "Because it's about you."

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"It's about both of us," she said in a high, silvery voice. "And he doesn't need to think he can leave it like this. I know him. He won't ever do anything without me. He's got to understand that. He's got to face it."

It was no outward display of force that lent her speech its absolute certainty. She was not the kind to clench her lovely jaw or even to lean forward for emphasis. The certainty came rather from that tantalizing, centripetal glow of frailty to which she expected force to come as the normal pressure of air breaks in toward a vacuum.

"You mean *I've* got to face it," Corrigan joked oddly, picking up the manuscript and hefting it. "I'll read this. I want to read it. But I don't know if anything you want will come from my reading it. I couldn't possibly use it as a basis for intervening in your personal life—even supposing that I had any means for doing so effectively. I feel that you've brought me this as if I were a lawyer and this was a document..."

"Just read it," she said. "You'll see."

All through that night he sat at home reading the story of the Forests. It was not the "true" story of what they were and how they had come so strangely matched together—for, as he had often admonished his class, truth requires form, and the intent to tell the truth is a pitifully weak guarantee that it will be uttered. After the glimpses and conjectures by which he had known the Forests during the past winter, here was only another glimpse and conjecture. The manuscript was—as Tyburn must have pointed out—hopelessly formless. Sometimes it was confessional in aim, and it reduced to comedy-scenes what must have been painful as a scraped nerve, and at other points it was so ponderously stylized and rhetorical that the tissue of dialogue and scene was squeezed to death by the language. It was a big manuscript and it was tedious. As a literary effort it was quite unmistakably inferior to the Korean war stories that Forest had shown him (and Corrigan realized with a pang that this was the precious work going on behind the scenes, saved until it could be

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shown to Tyburn's more fastidious gaze, while the pieces on which Forest had staked less were being shown to him). If he were to answer as a responsible critic, he could only say that the work was a great failure.

And yet as he read toward midnight he knew that there were images rising from the turgid brew and begging for completeness that were of more than ordinary power. Mangled giants struggling through a swamp, he thought, and it seemed to him that what the work needed—all that it needed, but that which a literary work must never need—was to be considered an amputated chunk of that reality which should have been its subject. *If* he, reading, added even the little he knew of Steve Forest and his wife—then the giants found their way, at least for a few steps until he could no longer support them and they floundered again.

He read of the spring night in the sorority house when Steve Forest (called Sid Fleischer in the manuscript, with a transparency so futile that Corrigan ignored it) had been washing dishes alone in the kitchen. As he worked at the sink he suddenly began throwing pieces of china out through the open window beside him, at first fearfully and then, when no one appeared to stop him, in an increasing rhythm, hearing them tinkle in the lonely dark outside. If he had stopped to think he might have rationalized this gesture as an appropriately defiant resignation of his job as hasher at the house. But he was not even thinking of it as defiance yet—only as something he must do because he was young and it was spring.

Then he had heard behind him, without having heard her footsteps as she came into the kitchen, the trusting, uninflectioned voice asking, "Why are you doing that?"

Not knowing yet and never to know, Corrigan thought, *how she had heard the tinkle of destruction and had come down from her second floor room because it was* that *she loved, needed, or chose. She would have recognized any splintering of windshield, crash of falling walls, smash of bottles as a call to which she must respond, faithfully hound-dogging the sign of destruction because it would have been for her the sound of the prison door opening.*

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"That's a stupid question," he had answered. *Frightened because he had been caught, expressing his fright in aggression, ready to "walk out" then as always later with his thumb to his nose, but tolerating her there, waiting, because she had come down smelling of them, all her sisters, because in her person they all stood there obediently waiting to be snowed with any silly explanation he might make up.*

Then under her non-accusing stare Forest had panicked. He did not want to be fired for breaking dishes, but most of all he did not want to be fired for having done something that he could not explain with dignity to the housemother when she got around to firing him. So he had gone out into the back lawn of the sorority house and began to gather the broken pieces of china up in his bare hands and carry them down the slope to the trash barrels. The girl, still in stocking feet as she had come downstairs, came to help him and (*with what meaning, purpose, cunning*?) had stepped on a shark-tooth shaped fragment of a cup. She sat there with the faint light slanting down on her from the kitchen window above, holding her foot while they both watched the blood ooze out through the dirty nylon. She said tranquilly, "It doesn't hurt. I can't feel it."

This was the image of their recognition. Its felt load of significance was grossly disproportionate to the scene in which Forest took her for the first time some weeks later. Perhaps the one moving statement of the lurid account of their mating in the basement smoking room of the sorority was the sentence, "She cried." Only that in twenty pages of prose that Forest might have memorized from the reading of spicy magazines during his lonely nights in Korea.

There was little enough to be made from Forest's report of the long, drawn-out conversations they had during the time they decided they were engaged. Except that even then Forest seemed to have suspected—what never became more than a suspicion—that she wanted him because she believed that he was "lower" than she. Her father was a lumber dealer in a middle-sized Illinois town—Anglo-Saxon, Methodist, the owner of a Cadillac and a twelve-room house, member of

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the country club, father of two boys in the insurance game, and a Republican. It never occurred to his daughter that these attributes were not marks of superiority. Merely, she did not want them. Forest was a Jew, a houseboy in her sorority, and—in his own admission to her—an artist. By these signs she recognized him as beneath her, and she wanted him.

Already by the time she had gone home to Illinois for the summer vacation, the horrid comedy in which she pursued, and he tried to evade, had begun.

If it had not been for their separation, Forest might have got away from her. He had gone with a friend in a battered car to Oregon for the summer. He had hocked everything and borrowed money from his parents, intending in his own phrase "to jump off a cliff and live." If he went too dangerously far in his self-abandonment he would "knock himself off." A nice cool bullet through the head didn't seem like such a bad idea sometimes." But in Portland he got mixed up with a crowd of painters at a beer party and had an affair with a coed from UCLA "whose equipment was phenomenal." He could, or would, or should have been content with her and have transferred to UCLA for the Fall term if it had not been for the letters from Elaine in Illinois.

He quoted one of the letters. It was an utterly flat and dull account of a week-end in which she had swum three afternoons at the country club and danced three evenings with some boys her cousin knew at Northwestern. She had been bored by it all, she said.

But the point was that Forest didn't believe the letters.

Precisely because they were so void of content, he had believed in anguish that there was something glamorous going on that she was not telling him. The hot prairie nights, the band playing under the stars, the colored lanterns quivering like live things in the palpitation of the air—Forest could imagine this and in the grip of his imagination could not conceive that in such a setting there was nothing going on that he needed to know about.

But you should have believed her, Corrigan thought, involved,

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the ever-passionate hick who yells warnings from the theater balcony, the sympathetic Freshman who wants to tell Othello not to believe Iago and doesn't give a wandering damn whether Shakespeare made a work of art or not. *You had to believe her that it was dull there because...* well, because if you or I or anyone else in this world could just hang on to the literal truth of things we'd save ourselves this awful bother of fiction, poetry, and pursuit of phantoms.

In the moment of his excitement, something banged Corrigan's chest like a stocking filled with sand. Palpitations, he thought. He poured himself a large glass of whiskey for a cure. It was not late yet. Not midnight. He was going to see this manuscript *through* before he went to bed, he told himself.

The memorable image from Forest's wedding was the present given him by his wife's parents. Because he was a writer—he took no pains to hide this from them when he suddenly appeared in their Illinois town and, with Elaine, announced what was about to happen—they gave him a Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.

But aside from the presentation of this ambiguous symbol the bride's parents seemed to have acquitted themselves rather decently under the shock of the marriage. In his manuscript Forest took great pains to mock their staid Republicanism, and he had "bit his lip" to keep from laughing at the marriage ceremony performed in the Methodist parsonage, but the sheer fact that they had permitted it to take place at all stood mutely to their credit, as well as the clumsy attempts of the parents to make him (the dark, exotic stranger come into town hitch-hiking and carrying only one cardboard suitcase) feel that now he must look to them for help "if things ever didn't go quite right."

In justice, Forest contrasted the dictionary to the Packard Sixes which the family had given his wife's brothers on the occasions of their marriage. Truly it was as if good common sense had told them not to spend too much for a marriage that wouldn't last. But again they had decently acted against this wariness in loaning the newlyweds the family Cadillac to drive to Chicago for a honeymoon.

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The honeymoon was the image of horror. On the one hand he had expected her to bring to the marriage bed in a cheap Northside hotel that glamor which she had so tantalizingly left out of her letters, that glamor of the upstairs in the sorority house—to bring him *the others* with whom he had so hopefully identified her. And she had lain there in his arms a single, naked, demanding self—not even as "phenomenally equipped" as the girl he had left in Oregon. He was too close to her, suddenly, to see that she was beautiful.

On the other hand, as soon as their first hasty bout on that rented bed was finished and even before she had commanded in that unworldly voice, "Do it again," he had glimpsed the immensity of her demand on him, the motive that had overridden parental objections and sorority platitudes about love and marriage as if they didn't exist. It was, Corrigan sensed, the depth of nothingness in her which had on the one hand permitted Forest to see whatever his desire could paint in her and conversely established her need for him. She must have someone whose imagination, whose occupation with her, would give her the reality she did not feel. From that first night when she had stepped on the glass and reported that she felt nothing, she had recognized Forest as the fabricator of her reality. She had watched him read *pain* when he saw the blood flowing. And if he had, in the proof, turned out to be an insufficient artist to turn her nothingness into existence, at least he was the only one she had ever known. And she was determined that he must suffice.

Now it was clear that her demand was a metaphysical one and to call its expression nymphomania was at best a clumsy metaphor. And in the same way it was clear what her ultimate motive had been in requiring Corrigan to read the manuscript about her. On the paradoxical bed in Chicago they had failed the test by which illusions and the need to be created might have been fused in reality. Deserted, and as if feeling herself fading back to the nothing she had been, she had called out one more time, and this time not to Forest, but through Forest's work to Corrigan. "See me. Make me real."

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"Read it, you'll see," she had said to him when he still accepted her pretense that some practical solution or at least benefit might come from his reading. Now, hypnotised into understanding, it was as if he heard the same words echoed in a damned but undespairing plea to him. *See me.*

The cursed honeymoon had lasted just two days before Elaine drove the Cadillac south out of Chicago by herself. And there was only one happy memory of it which Forest, with "Dostoevskian" self-abasement had put down. During an hour when his new wife was out of the room he had rifled her suitcase. It was full of such splendid underwear as he had only seen in store windows and the photographs of advertisements before—a foundation garment of orchid colored silk, a black half-bra and panties, a cloud of white lace, and a criss-crossing of white elastic straps with gleaming buckles—all that modern heraldry of romance and woman-cult suddenly, as he said, "his." Staring down into this treasury, Forest confessed, he felt the one moment of generous lust that he would know on the entire honeymoon. This, and not the dangerous void of the woman, was what he wanted. He had plunged his hands recklessly into the yielding stuff.

("... arms closing on wind, lips speaking a name which might be her name..." Corrigan remembered and added this fragment from Markwell's Orpheus poem to piece out the prose with which Forest had described the episode. But he sensed, in an uncontrolled impulse of compassion and humility, that he was being called on for a belief greater than his belief in poetry. He must not lament—and poetry was lamentation—on pain of losing her. *Do not look back. Believe she is with you.*)

The Forests (he read, further) had made another effort to live together when they came back to school at the beginning of the fall semester. They had rented a tiny apartment, installed in it the cloth of gold of her underwear and his Webster's Unabridged Dictionary and within a very few days it had become untenable for the two of them together. ("It was like having a body in the house with him," Forest

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had written with unintentional comedy.) She wanted to cook for him, and he was used to cooking for himself, a much better cook than she. She wanted him to stay home in the evenings and read his work aloud to her. (Since he was already deeply involved with this present manuscript in which he had so many derogatory things to say about her—its composition seems to have progressed like that of a journal—he felt trapped by her request, dreading at the same time that he might hurt her and that she was stifling his "honesty.") When he did read to her he had the feeling that she was not listening "critically". She seemed to bathe stupidly in the sound of his voice with no interest in its meaning. When he tried explaining to her that he wanted to be like Dostoevsky, she smiled a cat-like smile of satisfaction with him, as though he were *announcing* to her that he already was Dostoevsky. This made him wild. Couldn't she understand how goddamn lousy and imperfect his work was *now*, while he was learning his craft? To which she would reply maddeningly that she could understand that *too* and at the same time. In her oceanic emptiness she drowned his attempts to organize his life and his work logically. She cared nothing if he choked on his own inconsistencies as long as she could have him with her—"In there with her," he wrote, referring to the hated apartment.

("'You're trying to make a doll's house out of this,' Sid Fleischer yelled as he walked out. He was going downtown to get drunk. He was going to get damn good and drunk. Let her fester there in the festoons of the bourgeois respectability she had brought with her. He thought of how she would be in bed waiting for him when he got home. The covers would be pulled up to her eyes. Her catlike eyes would be watching him when he came in reeling drunk. She never seemed to sleep. If he woke during the night, she always seemed to be awake before him. Let her stay awake tonight. He was going to get drunk and he was not coming home.")

This must have been about the time I first saw them, Corrigan thought. He wondered with a sort of tense fascin-

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ation if he would presently appear as a character. He thought not, he would have seemed too unimportant, too neutral, to Forest. (And now he felt a queer, penitent impulse to agree with Forest's judgment in the matter, as if he had too easily accepted the damnation of neutrality.)

It's only now, this way, that I can belong in the story at all, he thought. Then he thought, they need me. If I weren't here, what Forest thinks of himself and her would be true, and if it is he's already lost her. Or what the world thought of them would be true, and if it were he had never loved her at all. It must not be true that Forest was a spoiled piece of slag from the Age of the Wars, an egomaniacal piece of waste who had blundered into marriage with a nymphomaniac. But if I am not real in this story by reading it and holding it all in my heart, then whatever game we've all started to play when we play at writing is lost, he thought. He was very tired now from the effort to compose the Forest story, but for the most important of reasons he would not let himself quit and go to bed.

He read into the dream sequence what Tyburn had mentioned to him and discovered what Tyburn, with his psychological insight, must have discerned—that it was a wish-fulfillment fantasy, in which the imagined rape of the wife was a hope of diverting her frightening attentions from himself. But it had another correlation, too, which opened out like an exploding fireworks bomb. Placed against it with a perhaps unconscious cunning was a passage describing her confession of her first sexual experiences. He had overcome her reluctance to speak of them by making love to her, and in the very tempest of their embrace had paused to whisper, "Tell me all about it,"—delighting to learn that it had been "a fraternity man, a real Joe College" who had deflowered her after a homecoming game.

Voyeur too, Corrigan thought with a groan, recognizing the dream, also, as a means by which Forest saw through his wife to the multiplicity of experience that could never be his. Voyeur... that term must be justly added to the long list of other truths about this... this *writer*.

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And admitting, as if to Tyburn or whatever other social judge might be concerned, the depravity involved, he relived in an overlapping revery his own recent glimpse of the girl. She was again in front of the fraternity house, descending from the swan boat with the Twentieth Century trim. The sun struck her gold. She turned with a hungry smile toward the light, then, between submission and rapture took the arm of her escort to let this Joe College lead her up the stairs and in through the secret door of the fraternity house to her destiny among the lives of strangers. As she disappeared—out of memory, out of conception—Corrigan felt his own lips shape to the begging question, "Tell me."

But the door was closed behind her. She had come to them, not reluctantly, but pleading to be made alive. They had lost her and this was the way the story ended.

He finished the last pages of the manuscript. There were no surprises left to come. He looked up at the mantelpiece clock. It was almost three now. Of what night? Of what reality? Of the clock's reality. He was an old man fondly wishing—and not for the first time, of course—that experience could be as coherent as desire. Then would I have held her—held them—in my heart.

But time was again the clock's time and the story would end there as it must end. "Arms closing on air..." "lips that would kiss form prayers"... while "love that robbed us of immortal things" gave nothing, gave nothing, gave nothing that time could not take back.

How could the Forests' story—which was his, now—end in time except with Forest (so clearly capable of any self-delusion) going off to forge in the smithy of the comic book trade the uncreated conscience of his race? While little Biddle, Eurydice of the expensive underwear, dropped back into the social mill pond from which she had so maladroitly and with such wasted expense, tried to raise herself.

In time the story ended with time's ending, and there would be neither occasion or need for him to say the one thing that mattered. Precisely there was the unavoidable terror—that he could never say to her with the imperial

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emphasis required to establish all it meant, "I saw." The consoling language of poetry was only available to the *one* who heard it. It was useless for communication and to no other human being could you ever communicate that you had not slept through the passion of his soul's need.

In defeat he rose from his chair and started toward the bedroom. Tomorrow he would return the manuscript to Biddle (half-regained, lost on the instant of discovery) and he would try to be socially kinder than Tyburn when he discussed its weakness and its merits. It is a terrible thing to be kind when you want to love. He would, out of kindness, refuse her any encouragement she could pass on to her errant husband. What could he say (having only the ear for and not the voice of poetry) except that time would have its way with them and their stories, fictionalized or real, that on either side of its narrow course remains the same primitive wall of darkness that rims it from the beginning?

We can not speak to each other. That was *so*, he thought furiously. But must not be. In the middle of the living room he stopped, feeling all his limbs tremble.

Do not look back. Believe they are with you. You cannot see ahead.

Suddenly—involuntarily, he thought—he spun on the toe of his right foot, kicking his left heel in the air. His left foot crashed down on the hardwood and he whirled on it. Around and around the room he went in a dizzying circle. Beyond all reason (but also beyond all treachery of the wish to stop) he yielded to the imperative of the dance. Bones creaking and muscles twinging he rioted on his way, an old man refusing death until the story came out with the coherence and continuity his soul demanded, dancing in the face of its tragic fragmentation, dancing because in the circumstances it was the common-sense thing to do.

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Then and Now

The following personalities were invited to take part in a round table discussion, held in the spring of 1964 at the American Students' and Artists' Center, Paris, concerning Paris "Then"—in the twenties and thirties—and "Now"— in the fifties and sixties:

The Moderator: Janet Flanner, longtime Paris correspondent of The New Yorker;

Virgil Thomson, leading American composer, for many years resident in Paris;

Maria Jolas, leading lady of the "thirties" literati, widow of Eugene Jolas, the founder of "transition" magazine;

Man Ray, painter and photographer closely associated with avant garde movements;

John Levee, American painter, native of California;

James Jones, noted American author; his most recent book is "The Thin Red Line";

William Gardner Smith, novelist, author of the best-seller "The Last of the Conquerors." After many years' residence in Paris he is now working with Ghana's new television service.

The following is an abridgment of their remarks.

David Davis, Executive Director: Good evening. On behalf of the American Center for Students and Artists, I want to welcome you to what we feel is an exciting and historic evening. Historic because so far as we know, no one has ever before brought together members of the "Lost Generation" and the present generation in such a forum; exciting because here at this table are outstanding representatives of the best creative thinking America has produced in the last forty years. They have come to compare notes, to talk, to look back to the past and into the future.

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We are proud of the work that our American creative minds have been doing here in France for the last forty years, and once in a while it is a good idea to take stock and to assess the meaning of the ferment they brought about. Our group here tonight is free to handle the subject in any manner it wishes—our moderator will, I trust, keep some semblance of order.

Janet Flanner: We shall all probably say too much. The opening question would be to decide whether to begin with the "Then", which is ourselves, or the "Now," which is them. Of course I am more interested in "them" than I am in "us"; mostly we all know *our* answers.

I see the situation of the American in Paris as being a question of voluntary emigration. That's the way it was for us "Thens". We chose to leave, not knowing how long we would stay. I'd like to find out why *your* generation has come over here, what satisfaction is given, how pleased you are with life here. What would you think, Mr. Painter, Mr. Levee?

John Levee: Well, I think one interesting point would be that it's not a question of emigration as much as migration. I use the word migration because like birds we all go back. And I can't help remembering something that Gertrude Stein said, "*L'Amerique c'est mon pays, Paris c'est chez moi.*" And I think we are a peculiar group, the artists, painters, and intellectuals who have migrated to France, in that I don't know of any of us who deny the fact that we are Americans; and yet when it is a question of where is *chez moi*, we sort of feel it is here. It's ever so nice to come back once you have gone. In fact to America, even for lengthy visits, as I say, we migrate. Of course we are living in an age where migration for us is much easier that it was for you; with the jet age it is just a question of hours. I come from California. To be in New York is really not much different from being here as far as time is concerned.

Flanner: Since you came from California, and went as far as New York, why didn't you stay there? Why did you want to come farther? As a painter?

Levee: As a human being more than as a painter. I have always thought that painting is what I do, which is perhaps the biggest proportion of what I am. Yet I am first of all a human being. I am in Paris because I like it. I prefer a hedonist, Catholic society to a Protestant, puritan, ascetic society. My parents would probably say, "eat the meat, it's good for you." I think a French parent would say, "eat *it*, *it*'s good". It tastes good, eat it. And I think there is a world of difference in this orientation, the fact that it gives pleasure, which is just cause and morally justifiable.

I came here to kill the Germans the first time, and I did a little of that, and then—again I have to use some French here, the verb *séduire* in

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French doesn't mean seduce, it means something a little different. The first time I came to Paris I was *séduit*, and I fell in love with Paris, at a very young age and wanted to come back. And I came back and I've stayed.

Flanner: How about the painting? Did you find a school here?

Levee: Certainly New York is the capital of painting, it is no longer Paris. The two most significant art movements since the fifties have come from New York: abstract expressionism, and then the newest development which is a sort of neo-dadaism called pop-art. But again, I am not only a painter but a human being preferring life here for many reasons—one of them certainly not the fault of America, or the fault of anyone, the question of scale in America. There is an inordinate, excessive, and really outrageous scale in America. The country is enormous. The countryside is enormous. Automobiles are enormous—*everything* is enormous. Since man is the measure of all things, then we can measure the relationship of man to his environment, to the things around him: the buildings, the roads, the trees. And I can only say that once, after living here six to eight years, I drove a car from New York to California. I was with my wife who is French, and when we were in New York we bought a picnic basket and all the wonderful things one can buy in delicatessens and we thought we would picnic. And we drove for ten days and five or six thousand miles and we never found a place to picnic. That's what I mean by scale. I have to say that I find that I function better in a scale which is more *à l'échelle humaine*.

Flanner: Speaking of scale, I remember Dolly Wilde, the niece of Oscar Wilde, recalling that Oscar had said that he disapproved of the Atlantic Ocean, it was much too large. He didn't go as far as to include the rest of the United States; I don't think he got that far West. I remember he also said that the statues in Central Park added a new horror to dying.

I think it's very interesting to hear a young man of this generation refer to what is, after all, the Reformation, and the relation between Puritan and Catholic social life. I don't often expect to hear young Americans realize that there *was* a Reformation, and that they benefit by it.

Man Ray is an artist. As an émigré, you are a "Then"—answer the "Now". Why did you come? I've known you so long that *I* know the answer.

Man Ray: Well, *I* don't know. I can only speak from a very personal point of view. I had a very peculiar problem as a painter in New York, where I was rejected, criticized, attacked, refused exhibitions finally, because I was considered a joker. The things that I was doing at the time were absolutely unacceptable. I thought that if I changed the landscape... I didn't particularly think about Paris except that

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there were museums here where I wanted to see the originals of paintings I had doted on in magazines and art books when I was an art student. Unfortunately, when I got over here I got tied up with the avant-garde movement which despised museums, which wanted to destroy them. I ran into the Dada movement. And since I had been working in that direction in New York, I was warmly welcomed here and that was quite marvelous. Quite a different reception from what I had had in New York—where they questioned my "seriousness" my "profundity", words which should be eliminated from the dictionary. Just as I would like to eliminate such words as "émigré" or "expatriate." Or the "Lost Generation"—that haphazard phrase invented by Gertrude Stein, out of spite, I think. Why do they remember us if we're "lost"? They keep talking about us all the time. No, I am trying to live in the present. I want to forget the past. As far as I am concerned, people seem to be too easily satisfied with dates, historical facts, so much so that they cannot get down to the actual ideas which these individuals of the past represent and stood for, fought for, as we did. Ideas which are current even now. You speak of pop-art. I was interviewed by the *New York Times* on my attitude toward pop-art. Well, they made a mistake in printing the article. The title read "pup-art", pup. Immediately the editor phoned me and said, "you know we stopped the editions after a few copies were run off; we noticed the mistake and we corrected it." "Oh," I told him, "you should have left it 'pup-art', because that's all it is, really." It's an outgrowth of the old Dada movement. I don't object to it. We did things a few inches big; now they do things three meters big and get paid by the square inch. Wonderful, I say, that's marvelous for them. I am all for people who can put over things like that. It's fine, I think, that they should get some of the gravy, as we say. Money is the most plentiful thing in the world; works of art are very rare—they are individual things and they are limited, only one of a kind. So every artist to me is sacred. Whether he's a pop-artist or an academic artist, I don't care what he does.

Flanner: Man, I would like to ask one question. How much continuity exists from one art group to another?

Ray: We cannot produce or create anything unless there has been something before of which we are aware. And all the young group, this new generation, is perfectly aware of what went on before; and there is an outgrowth of it just as the Renaissance had its masters...

Flanner: You don't think that at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the Dada period was not so much a coming out of what had been done before, as a coming out *against* what had come before?

Ray: Well, that was a very transitory period. The Dada movement was negative, it was destructive. You can only begin creating when you feel the ground first. You cannot build on ground that is already

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built up, so the idea of the Dadaists was to first level the ground. They had no future ideas. That came after—with the Surrealists who had a more constructive program—that is, after the Dadaists had swept the ground clear. But they were the same people, it wasn't a new group that came along, but exactly the same people, who then began to seek for a more positive, a more constructive attitude in new sources of inspiration, like the subconscious, the dream world, the automatic acts, you see. That was all a very logical and inevitable development. And probably today the younger generation is also a logical and inevitable development of what came before in *our* generation. So this will go on and possibly in the near future there will be a tremendous upheaval of something which we may not be able to understand. But we're not trying to *improve*, art is not progress like science. Science is progress. And where it leads to I don't know—to our destruction, finally. But in art there is no progress. We cannot do better than the old masters or the generation before us, we can only do something different. And if there is any justification, *that* is our justification, because we are different. If I have anything profound in me, every stroke, even if it's a spit on a piece of paper, will be profound. And if I haven't it in me, all my efforts to be significant, profound, will be of no avail.

Flanner: When did you come, James?

James Jones: Nineteen fifty-eight. Actually, I didn't come over to stay; I only came to spend a year, or a year and a half. I think I fell in love with Paris because it's simply beautiful, you know. John mentioned something earlier about feeling morally right in staying here. For me, there is no question of morality involved. I am not required to be either moral or immoral by staying here. I've found after living here for a while that being separated from America is good for me. First, specifically, because I tend to be overcritical of America when I am there and I see it at first hand. Here, because I do feel like an outsider living in Paris, I have a certain nostalgia for America. It allows me to be a little more magnanimous towards some of the things about it I don't like, which, were I there, I think might influence my work too assiduously—so that I would be perhaps unfair. I like America better here than there. One has a tendency not to say critical things at home because it's looked at askance. You've got to be a booster, you know what I mean? Whereas here, the French don't consider that every Frenchman has to be a booster of everything French...

Flanner: It depends upon whose Republic you're living in.

I think the idea is very true, that there's a kind of softness in retrospect... it can't be romanticism because I don't think we feel that way about it. I think it's very difficult to feel romantically about America, I think that's one of the appeals of Europe.

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Jones: I find that living here, I am totally non-involved with the French problem: if they elect De Gaulle or don't elect De Gaulle, for example. It doesn't matter much to me one way or the other as long as I don't get shot.
Flanner: Well, you're just a coward, that's all.
Jones: I grant you that, completely, but during the Algerian troubles and all the army troubles, I didn't feel that if something happened, I was responsible. In America, I would feel that way. I'm able here to surround myself, however untrue it is, with a sort of balloon, cushioning air in which I can do the work I want to do. And all of these things work towards another one of my reasons for staying, that the artist has got some sort of honor here, you know? Statues and streets are named after him. I was astounded when I first came here: I didn't read in Hemingway that there were streets or statues named after Victor Hugo, he didn't mention it.
Flanner: Maria, you go on from here.
Maria Jolas: Well, I went to Berlin to study singing in nineteen-thirteen, then to New York during the war, when I had a singing teacher whose usual place of teaching was Paris. As soon as the war was over, she returned to Paris and I followed her; it was as simple as that. There was no romanticism, no chestnut trees in bloom, no April in Paris, none of those things. It was just simply that I wanted to follow this singing teacher. And so I stayed with her until she died. And then I met Eugene Jolas and we got married and then I stayed on with him. I've never felt that I was an exile, an expatriate, and I've never had any of those feelings of being detached either from my own country or from this one. This has seemed to me in many ways an extraordinarily friendly, easy place to live, and to be quite honest I think most of our generation would say that one of the reasons they came and stayed here was that there was a sordid economic facility that made it possible for them to stay on here for small sums. I can tell you that in 1927 we rented General De Gaulle's present home at Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises for four thousand francs a year.
Ray: One hundred and sixty dollars.
Virgil Thomson: You could get a round trip third-class on the best French or British steamship for about a hundred and twenty dollars.
Jolas: We lived in that house for three years because my husband felt that it was cheap, and it was, and agreeable, and a quiet way of editing a magazine. That was "transition." I went back to America for my first visit in eighteen years two months ago and one night I met a psychoanalyst who said, "Oh, Mrs. Jolas, there's something I have always wanted to know. Did your husband choose the name of 'transition' because backwards it says, 'no it isn art.' "

I am inclined to think that some who came in our generation came for financial reasons, others came just for the ride, some came for that

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other... which really was a reason, which was prohibition in the United States. It created a rather disagreeable atmosphere for the light-hearted, particularly when people died of gin made in bathtubs. And then I think quite seriously that many came and stayed for the same reasons that Stravinsky came, that Picasso came, that Joyce came. There just seemed to have been a sort of an extraordinary rendezvous in Paris at that time. It had begun with the Russian ballet, and, of course, there were the persecutions to the east, and shall we say even the persecutions to the west, because prohibition was to a certain extent a persecution. There was a "conjuncture" of something so magnetic about Paris at the time that anyone who felt, anyone who sensed it, realized that here was perhaps the rare moment of the century. And certainly—I say this in all simplicity just as a historian might say it—to a certain extent we're still living on the accomplishments of that avant-garde.

William G. Smith: I was thinking that the "Lost Generation," the first generation that came over...

Jolas: Oh by the way, may I just interrupt you a second and say that in Hemingway's book, the book that just came out (*A Moveable Feast*, ed.), we have the origin of that ridiculous phrase.

Thomson: And he gives it wrong, mistranslating from the French. The term was used to Gertrude Stein by a hotel owner in a Belin town who complained of an automobile mechanic, the kid had just come back from the war, by saying, "*Oh, ils sont tous une génération perdue*", meaning that after four years out of learning your trade there is a four-year gap in the practice of the trade. And those who come out of the war will not learn it because they lost the years they would have been learning it.

Flanner: A "lost-out" generation would be a better translation, I think.

Thomson: Now if it is meant that these are lost souls on account of their war experiences—which is not at all a French idea—it would have been said, "*ils sont une génération* de *perdues*".

Flanner: Of lost ones.

Thomson: Yes, but Hemingway heard her say this and, you know, in his cagey little self-advertising mind, he put it as the motto of a book, saying, "you're all a lost generation," and there they all are, drinking at the *Select*, you know. And advertising himself and his friends as a lost generation that got found through literature and publicity and so forth. They were never lost, or he was never lost, nobody was lost—in any spiritual or ethical sense, any more than in any other generation. But the phrase had a certain specific meaning and still does in French usage.

Jolas: Now will you continue?

Smith: I think there is a difference between the "Thens" and us

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"Nows" in the sense that you had more positive reasons for coming here, and we came here for mainly negative reasons. Let me put it this way. You talked about the ferment in Paris at the time, and I know there was the same sort of ferment in the States. It was the nineteen-twenties that had that ferment, and a relatively gay life, expensive life. You came to France, you found a cheaper life and you found a very vigorous artistic movement which, as you said, we are still living on. I think *we* came for negative reasons. We came because we were pushed out, and I think you came because of a magnet that pulled you. Of course, I can give general reasons and specific reasons why I am in France. I can give standard ones, like I *do* like that cliché of the sunset on the Seine, I *do* like coming home late and seeing the light at five o'clock in the morning. And I like waving to the coal bargers when they pass the *Vert Galant*. I like the twisting streets. Gordon Heath, who's a singer here, says when he's asked why he stays in France instead of going back to the States, "I can't stand straight streets."

And I like the slowness. It's not really slow, but what I mean is I was delighted when I first came here and discovered that after a while, I didn't feel guilty any more when I sat on a café terrace all afternoon. At first it was horrible. And I noticed that when Americans come over now and I say, "Sit down and have a drink," they sit down and after a half-hour they get nervous and they say shouldn't we go and see a museum or go someplace.

I had been offered a job just before I left the States with a magazine, for a lot of money. And I said, no, I'm going to France. The magazine editor came over here and he saw me living in a little room in a hotel with cold water and horrible flowered wallpaper, and he said, "You turned down my job for *that*?" And he didn't really understand when I said, "Yes, exactly for that."

Now specifically, two main things drove me out of the United States; negative things. I had been to Germany before. I went there in the occupation Army, and I was there a little over a year. When I got back to the States, I had the feeling of stifling. The two negative things were politics and race. McCarthy was around; I don't get along very well in that kind of atmosphere. My professor at Temple University, Professor Dunham, wrote a book, *Man Against Myth*. And he was called before the McCarthy committee and he said, when questioned, "I refuse to recognize your existence." Temple University fired him. I saw the ones who had suffered for just standing up and saying no, who didn't join any bandwagon, who wanted to think for themselves. Here in France—well, it's one of the freest countries in the world, but of course it has its paradoxical, dictatorial side too. French critics have all pointed out that neither *Doctor Strangelove* or *Seven Days in May* could have been made in France, it's not possible. And I

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talked to a French publisher about my last book; he told me it was very courageous to have written the book, but we can't publish it in France. It's peculiar: you can do things in the States, you can say things in the States, that you can't say in most other countries. And yet you feel so free in France, on an everyday level, just living here.

Now about the racism. I had written three books, the third was an absolute move towards total silence. I discovered that I was not going to write anymore. My feeling was one of disgust and rage. When I wanted to go on vacation, I had to suddenly stop and look and say now wait a minute, am I accepted there? People can very easily say, well, let's go to Florida for a vacation. I have a lot of white friends and they can say it just like that. And when I say, now wait a minute, are you sure that's going to be all right, they look at me and say, what are you talking about, you're sensitive or something. And then we'd go and they would find out. It was constant irritations like this—and the daily headlines and so forth—which got me to the point psychologically where I just didn't want to write, because I didn't want to communicate. I didn't have anything else to say. To communicate means you like the other person, you want to explain something to the other person. That had been true with the first books when I had been younger.

I had planned to come for a year, just like James. That was twelve years ago.

Jones: I've been thinking about why I like living here. Every government in order to exist today must have a bureaucracy and the better it functions, the worse it is for the citizens, but the better the trains run, you know. I really think one of the reasons living in France is better for us is that French bureaucracy was set up so early in the age of bureaucracy that it is, in fact, totally inefficient. I'm sure it functions, but it is fairly negligible unless you run into a nice monument with your car, or something. Then they'll get you, but it'll take *years*.

Jolas: May I say something about French bureaucracy? I had the following experience. I lost my *carte d'identité* and I went down heavily chaperoned to the *Prefecture* to get another one and I was ushered into the hands of a lady who had been instructed to treat me nicely. And I was opposite her and on her desk was a big dossier with my name on it. And I looked at it interestedly and she said, would you like to see that while I finish writing. And I said yes, that would interest me very much. And I found in the dossier every official paper of any kind that I had ever signed in France since I first came in nineteen-nineteen, together with all those that my husband had ever signed in France. And the girl apologized and said she was extremely sorry that the pictures were a bit faded but you know in 1940, when we had to put all our dossiers on barges, the dampness... In other words I think French bureaucracy works badly for the public, but wonderfully for them.

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Jones: Well, the F.B.I. would probably not apologize for the faded pictures.

Flanner: Nor would they leave the dossier open. I had one left open in front of me once and the man who was arranging to give me a *carte d'identité* went into the next room. I opened my dossier and the first thing that I saw was that I had been a spy for the Communists in Bulgaria, Roumania, and someplace else, probably Czechoslovakia. And I realized this had come from having bought a cheap ticket to come back from Constantinople to Marseille. It was apparently deduced, because I didn't have visas for those countries, that I had passed through secretly and thus had been a spy.

Jones: I went down to get a paper once, that I had to have, a very important paper. Actually it was my driver's license. I have a good lawyer, well I pay him very well. But, just as an experiment, I went to find the office and get the thing by myself. So I called my lawyer before I went to the *Prefecture* and I said if I don't come out... well... But I actually spent four hours in there, and it got to be like Kafka's *Trial*. There were lots of people, they kept sending me here and there and they looked me up and they tried to find something about me, but nothing having to do with what I wanted to know. And the things all had thick dust on them. Finally, I had to give up in despair. So I went back to the telephone and called the lawyer and said, well, you'd better send somebody down because I don't know how to find the office in the first place. Unfortunately, in America we are much more efficient than that.

Flanner: Virgil, will you contribute some more.

Thomson: You don't have to come to France to pass your youth anymore, you don't have to come for sex anymore, it's better in America. And you don't come for economy anymore; it's the most expensive country in Europe. You don't really have to come for instruction in the arts and sciences on the whole, that's as good at home, maybe better. Several years ago, Mary Garden took a trip to America and travelled all around the country giving lectures, and everywhere she went she would hear singers and recommend them to her rich friends. She was a kind woman and an artist. And when she came back to New York she said, they don't have to go to Europe to learn to sing because there are better singing teachers here than in Europe. And then she said, they still have to go to Europe to learn about distinction. And I think that sums up the whole business. You get arrested here and you say to the police that you are an artist, and they bow. If you say to the cops in America that you are an artist, see what happens, it's against you, in spite of the fact that art makes a lot of money and is advertised in all the newspapers and magazines. Still there is the anti-cultural, know-nothing background, maybe partly Puritan, although it doesn't necessarily exist in all Protestant countries. But you know,

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you're given kind of hearts and spades in France. I think the distinctive thing, the human consideration, is that the higher powers of the mind are among the higher powers of man, and that doesn't change. That's the miracle.

Flanner: I think that probably one of the things that is the most instructive, the thing that one really learns here and one doesn't learn, at least I didn't learn easily in America at all, is the question of critical faculty... taste, as you call it. That the French have got, they call it *la mesure*, the proportion. But it really is a question of the critical faculty. It isn't a question of whether this is so much better than that, it's a question of *why*, and what makes it so.

Jones: Up to now there doesn't seem to be any disagreement between our generations at all. But what I find different about us today, is that for people of my generation who came here, there is no cohesive explosion, cohesive philosophy molding them together into a group which did exist in the Twenties. I don't know what you thought at the time, whether you thought there would be another world conflagration. Certainly no one ever thought about atomic bombs. I think this bomb question has affected us in a large sense, in such a way that we cannot have so cohesive a philosophy today, here as artists. We're all sort of loners, really, we're faced with problems which at the time did not exist: is art going to survive in the world we live in? We're not at all sure that it will.

I am seriously afraid that the novelists of the future are going to be men like a man whom I admire, but still don't consider his work as novel-writing, Oscar Lewis, who went down to Mexico and tape-recorded the story of the entire family Sanchez, then brought the tapes back and edited them. This is a bona-fide sociological study and I'm scared, I mean seriously scared. It fits in with what I was saying about bureaucracy. It's every generation's right and duty to have an *angoisse*. But I'm trying to make a distinction in terms. I'm not so concerned with the atom bomb; if we blow ourselves up, I'll laugh like hell, and go out with everybody else. I couldn't care less. What I care about is the steady encroachment of the bureaucracy in all our lives which is what marks Americans who come here.

Thomson: Do you mean a bureaucracy or the police?

Jones: The police are only a small part of it; I mean the executive bodies, the judicial bodies, the...

Thomson: For heaven's sake. The Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, why everybody's got to be rough, you see. A department store, Standard Oil, everything has to be rough.

Jones: But they never had the mechanical means and the efficiency before today. This is the problem of our generation, to attack...

Thomson: I think you mean the ability of an unauthorized bureaucracy to bully you.

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Jones: Not at all, not at all. I mean the problem of a completely authorized bureaucracy which is in every branch of our government today. And when the day comes, when everyone works for the government, who's going to write the books without getting fired?
Thomson: Well, during the Twenties, one-fourth of the French population was working for the French government, and the proportion hasn't changed very much since. The bureaucracy here includes every school teacher and includes a far higher number of police per inhabitant than we have, and every railway worker. The bureaucracy here is enormous.
Flanner: As for whether we were as "anguished" as you are, I don't think we were. The seriousness of existence, the seriousness of the mental interests, or the aesthetic interests, all of that was certainly heavily discussed, and we were extremely talkative, too, we were a very talkative generation. We would sit at café terraces until two or three o'clock in the morning and we were probably saying the same things slightly differently, again and again. It was very instructive; I think that doesn't go on now.
Jones: I think some of it does, but I don't think there's that cohesive philosophy today that existed then and made one feel a part of some movement. Today, one has to attack alone.
Davis: I'd like to ask a question, Janet Flanner. *You* haven't mentioned why you came here.
Flanner: I think that's pretty clear. I came partly because of something I think Mrs. Jolas mentioned, which is aesthetics. I think if I had been born in a prettier part of the country than I was born in, which was flat and corn land, I wouldn't have been so eager to appreciate the beauties of Paris and Europe. I came from pure aesthetic selfishness and on a tiny, tiny income. Which is what gave the freedom to live here, as Ernest says, on almost less than less.
Levee: I've been struck by the sameness in the two generations, rather than the difference. Everyone seems to agree that there's a certain repressive, constrictive atmosphere in America, of one nature or another, and that seems to be the reason why people leave. Then there's the question of why do they come here? Why don't they go to Hong Kong? It's a very difficult thing to talk about beauty, but there is a visual delight here, and people who are visually orientated find Paris and France... I once talked with Calder who said something so silly and so profound. He said the reason I like France is I like the walls. He talked about the walls around his place in the Loire, and the walls in Paris and the walls all over Europe and I think it comes down to a sensuous delight in the visual things that slip by you continuously.
Jolas: "transition" published what is called an "enquète" on the subject of why do Americans live in Europe, in 1932, and I remember Gertrude Stein's answer, part of it. She said that it is impossible to

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work in one's parents' house, and that just now, America was the oldest country in the world. And that it would be renovated, and then perhaps the artist could work there, you see.

Thomson: She said a very nice thing, too, which was, it wasn't so much what France gave you, it was what it didn't take away.

Two Poems by David Ray

IN THE HILLS

Measuring out the Jack
Daniels at 1 : 25,
closing the cupboard;

turning the faucet
for which I went
to dig out the spring

for which I let
the air out of the line
and heard gurgling;

swinging the glass
tinkling with cubes
and feeling the burn

in my throat; this is
the pilot light.
Stepping outside

onto the stones
hauled from the hills
by the man who left

the barns to tumble
and harness to rust in forty
years of hay, amid the sorrow

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of vanished drayhorses,
that moon
above the burdock pile

(at the end of an aisle
and nave
cut out of high

timothy and weeds)
and advancing across
the grass where the dog sleeps

and looking up at
Orion, that
that is the flame.

THE EX-HUSBAND'S WIFE

She'd rather hobble to the window
to look out on garages and planets
in conjunction
than share her alarm or clock with him,
the blank stare of the vanity
mirroring a stale view of
what she says she'd rather do without

Yes, she loves him, she says,
but he doesn't love her back
so she doesn't love anybody
else back, it's a kind of fealty
to his policy, Floyd's,

A policy of, let us say, traveling
canyon roads in an old Ford,
the rumbleseat a part of his charm
and Yellowstone just ahead

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Jeremy Larner *(Oh, the Wonder!)* born in 1937, is half-Russian Jew and half American Indian. He has written for Partisan Review, New Republic, Dissent, and others. His novel, *Drive, He Said*, just published in America, is the winner of the Delta Prize. It will be published in England by Anthony Blond.

R. V. Cassill *(And in My Heart)* has published more than forty stories in many magazines, including The Atlantic Monthly, Accent, New World Writing, and Esquire. He has been a professor in the writing program at the State University of Iowa for several years, and has also taught at Columbia and the New School. His most recent novels were *Clem Anderson* (1961) and *Pretty Leslie* (1963).

INTERVIEW

John Phillips *(The Art of The Theater I – Lillian Hellman)* is a novelist and Advisory Editor of the Paris Review since its founding. He has a summer house in Martha's Vineyard, Mass., the island where the interview with Miss Hellman took place.

Anne Hollander *(The Art of The Theater I - Lillian Hellman)* designs costumes, paints, and translates occasionally. She lives in New Haven, Connecticut with her husband and two children.

PORTFOLIO

Avigdor Arikha was born in Bukovina, Rumania, in 1929, and emigrated to Israel in 1944 after three years in a concentration camp. He studied at the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem and L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. In addition to illustrating many books in Israel, France, Switzerland and Sweden, he has had one-man shows in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Stockholm, Copenhagen, London, and Paris, and been shown at the Venice Biennale, the Paris Biennale, and the Milan Triennale.

Patrick Bowles *(Interview with Arikha)* is a poet and translator, who has done translations of Samuel Beckett and Durrenmatt. He has been Paris Editor of the Paris Review until this issue.

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POETRY

Robert Creeley *(Anger)* has appeared in the *Paris Review* before. He teaches at the University of New Mexico; Scribners published his poems *(For Love)* and novel *(The Island)*, both of which have been published in England, along with his short stories *(The Book)*, by Calder.

Donald Davie (*Pieta*) was born in Yorkshire, served with the Royal Navy in Ceylon, India and North Russia, and taught at universities in Cambridge, Dublin, Santa Barbara and Cincinnati. His fourth collection of poems, *Events and Wisdoms*, appears this year along with a volume of translations from Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago poems, and a critial study of Ezra Pound. He is now Head of the School of Comparative Studies at the University of Essex.

Galway Kinnell *(Last Spring, On the Frozen Field)*, author of *What a Kingdom It Was*, published his second collection of poems in Spring 1964. He has taught in New York, Chicago, France, and Iran and currently makes his home in New York City.

Denise Levertov *(A Lamentation; As It Happens; The Mutes)* is the author of six books of poems, the most recent *O Taste and See* published by New Directions in 1964. She sends us these poems from Temple, Maine. A collection of her work will be published by Jonathan Cape in England.

George Oppen (*A Narrative*) has published two books of verse: *Discrete Series* (1934) and *The Materials* (1962). His work—along with that of William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Marianne Moore, and others—appeared in Ezra Pound's *Active Anthology* of 1933. He now lives in Brooklyn.

Robert Sward *(All for a Day)* is currently on the faculty of Cornell University. *Uncle Dog*, published in England, was his first collection; it was followed by *Kissing the Dancer*, published by Cornell Press.

David Ray *(The Ex-Husband's Wife, In the Hills)*, teaches at Reed College, Oregon. His book of poems, *X-Rays*, will soon be published by Cornell University Press. At present he is "trying to complete a novel".

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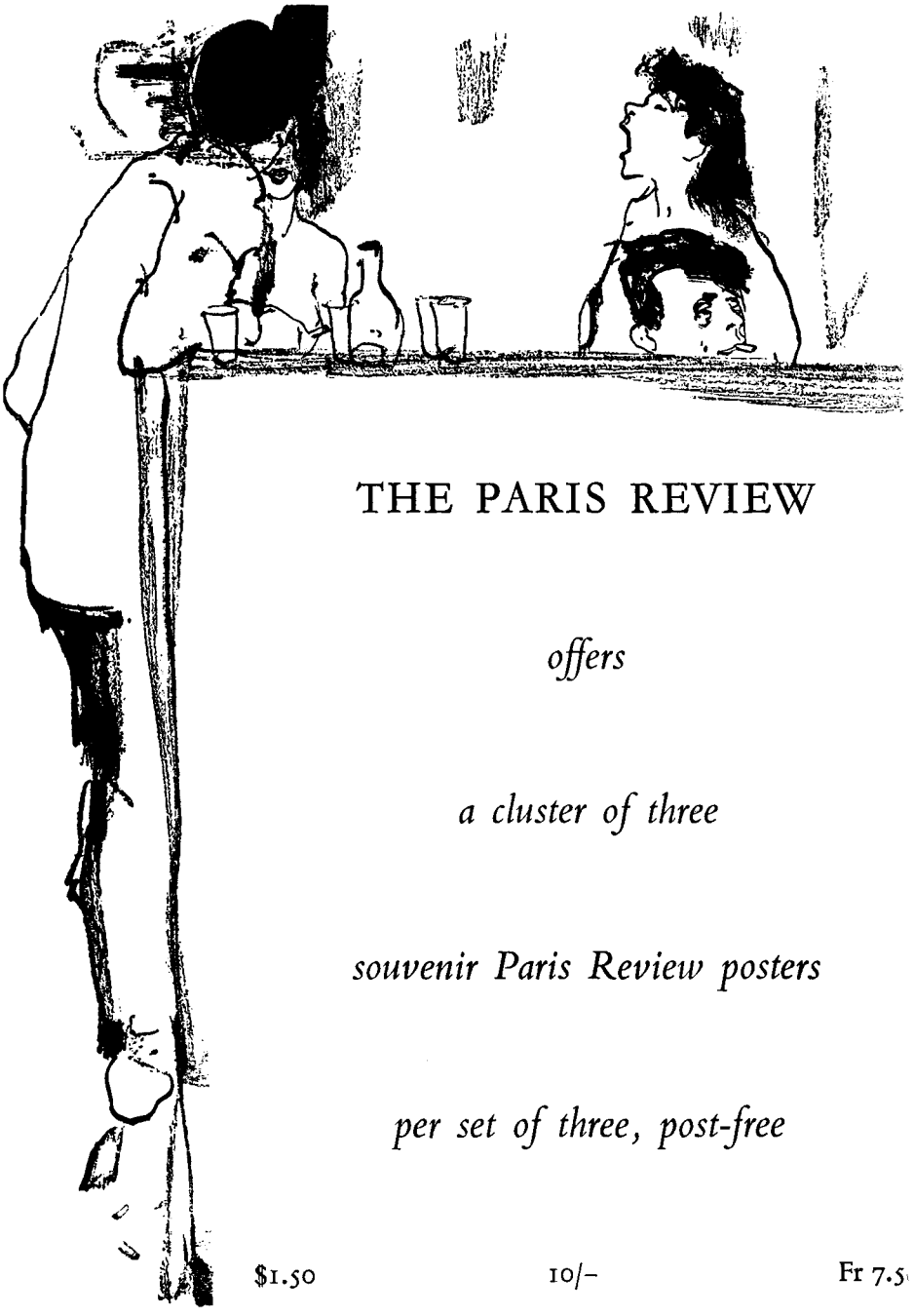

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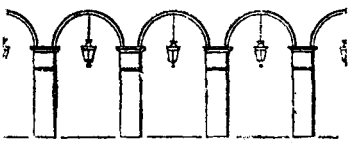

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